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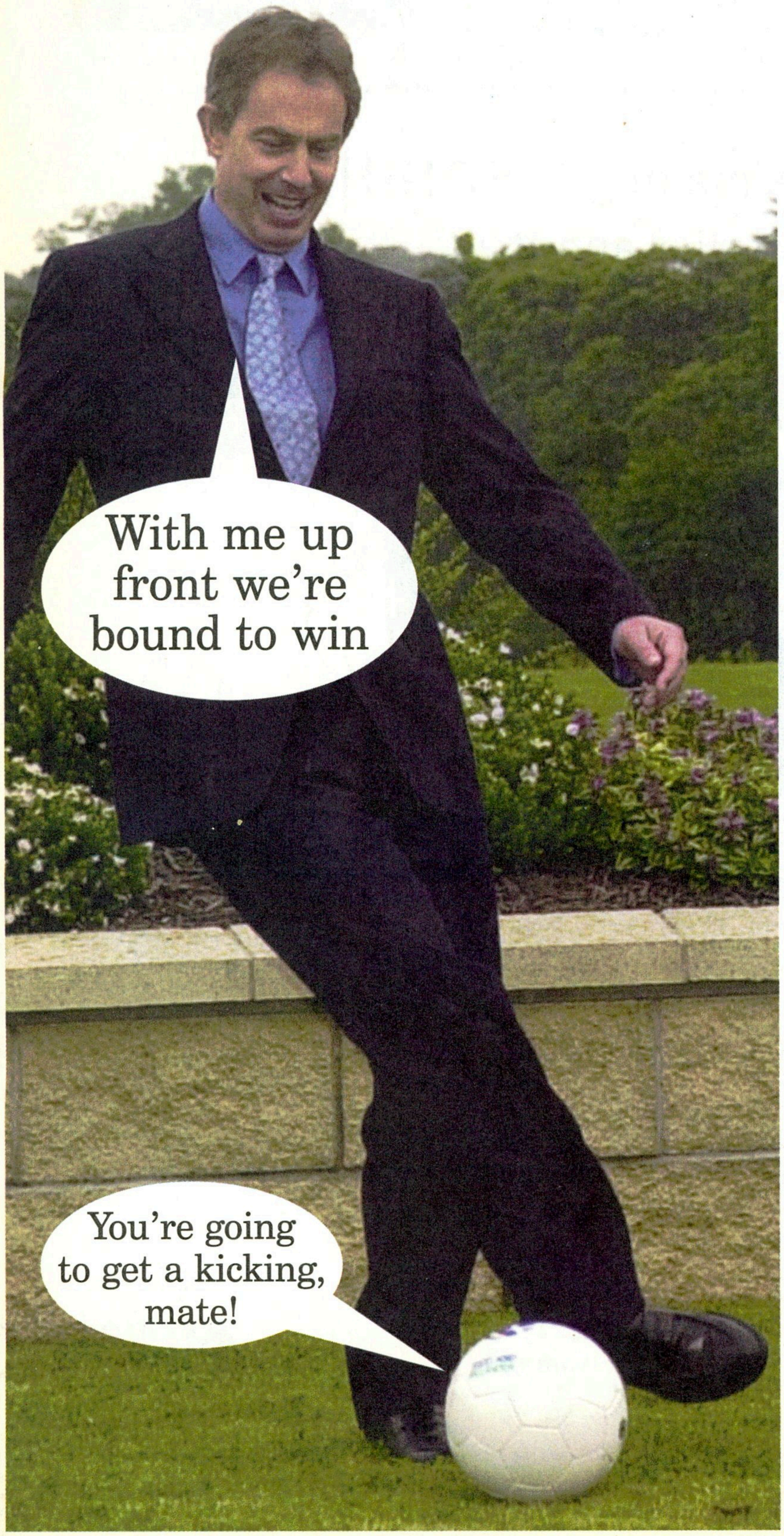

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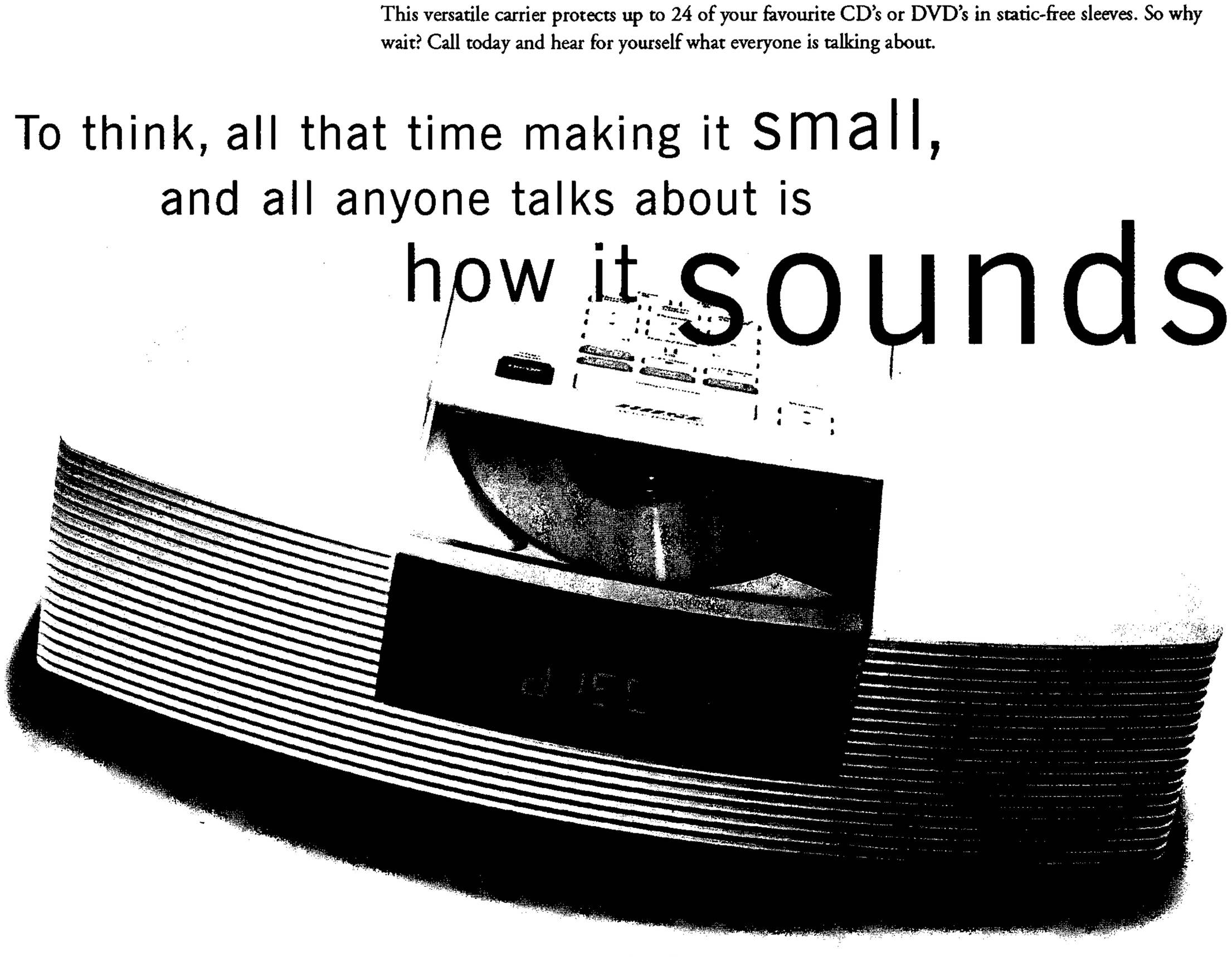

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Gnome

IT IS regrettable that the Governor of the Bank of England should have created panic by his ill-chosen remarks about a possible end to the boom in house prices. Only prompt action by the Chancellor managed to save the situation before there was a total collapse in confidence, panic selling of property and a full-scale economic depression of a kind not seen since 1927.

The prospect of cheaper houses is indeed a shocking one and we must all do everything in our power to ensure that the day-by-day increase in value of our houses is maintained at a steady 17% for ever.

Only then can we be assured of economic stability and sustainable prosperity for myself if not necessarily for others.

Lord Gnome
Chairman, The Gnomefax
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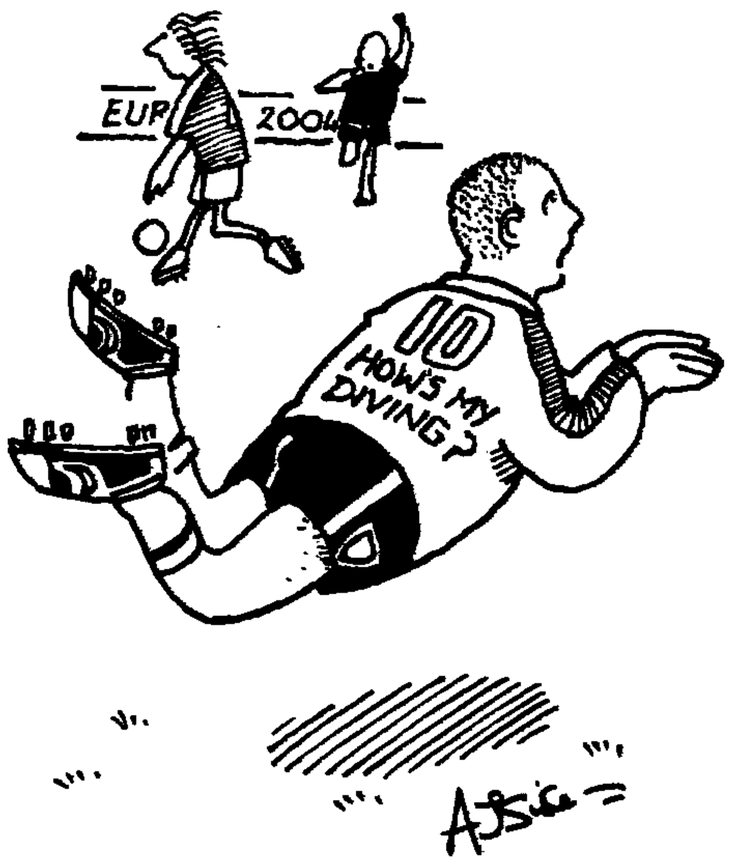

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ABC

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IS THERE no limit to the loyalty of disgraced former secretary of state Peter Mandelson MP to his master in Downing Street?

One of Mandy's lesser-known jobs is his post on the international advisory board to the Independent group of newspapers (which he declares in the Commons register of interests without saying how much he earns for it).

A recent meeting of the board in South Africa was surprised to receive a letter from Mandelson bitterly attacking the *Independent* for its line on the government, the Iraq war and above all for its contemptuous dismissal of the Hutton report.

Mandelson's letter won some support from other members of the advisory board, some of whom are from Northern Ireland where Mandelson was secretary of state and where the Independent Group owns the *Belfast Telegraph*.

No reference was made during his splenetic attack to the *Indie*'s staggering rise in circulation nor to the awards the paper keeps on winning for its coverage of Iraq. The future looked rather bleak for editor Simon Kelner, who was not at the meeting, until proprietor Tony O'Reilly asked whether the board members wanted to put their names to a proposal that Kelner be reprimanded.

"Oh, no not at all," was the immediate chorus in reply and the matter was dropped. Not entirely though. The *Eye* hears that Mandelson has been politely told by the advisory board his services will no longer be required.

NICOL STEPHEN, the earnest Lib Dem businessman who is minister for transport in Scotland, has just announced that the "preferred bidder" for the £1.7bn contract to run Scottish railways for the next seven years is the huge private transport combine, First Group.

The chief executive of First Group, Moir Lockhead, lives in Mr Stephen's Aberdeenshire constituency, not far from his home. The two are close friends and have also done business together.

Mr Stephen's corporate communications group (in which he still declares an interest) is Glassbox. One of Glassbox's most lucrative contracts ever, before Mr Stephen got to the Scottish parliament, was to polish the corporate image of First Group.

Is there a possible conflict of interest here? Not at all, a spokesman for the Scottish executive assured the *Eye*, explaining that the competitors for the role of preferred bidder for the rail franchise weren't named when they put in their bids.

Thus Mr Stephen did not know the name of the preferred bidder until he picked the winner on the basis of the bids the competing firms made. Only then was he told the winner's identity. So that's all right then.

MORE on Labour's "ethical" foreign policy. Foreign office ministers used the cover of the elections on Super Thursday to rush through a special "Order in Council" blocking the return of the inhabitants of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to their old homes.

The order overturned without debate a high court judgment of four years ago that said the islanders could return to Diego Garcia from where they were summarily removed 30 years ago to make way for an American military base. The London-based lawyer for the 4,500 thousand islanders said: "Not since the days of King John has anyone tried to expel British citizens from the realm by executive order."

Meanwhile foreign office minister Bill Rammell feebly claimed that "natural events were likely to make life more difficult for a re-settled population and in the longer term global warming". No such concerns bother the Americans, who continue to upgrade Diego Garcia, where contractors have recently finished building a new detention camp christened "Camp Justice".

Rammell's old boss at the FO might have something to say about this shabby episode. For it was Robin Cook who originally promised to make British foreign policy "ethical" and, more importantly, it was a young, flame-haired backbencher by the same name who first took up cudgels on behalf of the displaced British citizens of Diego Garcia more than a quarter of a century ago.

WHY was Jon Symonds, chief financial officer of drugs giant AstraZeneca, so worried about the government's threat earlier this year to "name and shame" companies engaged in tax avoidance?

After all Mr Symonds is co-chairman, with Dave Hartnett, the "business friendly" head of tax policy at the Inland Revenue, of the Revenue's extremely "business friendly" Business Tax Forum, and is always keen to make clear that business leaders work closely with government in stamping out tax avoidance.

So why did he tell the *Financial Times* on 2 April that "naming and shaming is not going to be very constructive"? Here's a clue. In a case currently before the courts in the US, tax avoidance specialists KPMG refused to disclose the names of the purchasers of a complex but very lucrative tax avoidance scheme called the "contested liability acceleration scheme". This scam "saved" rich taxpayers $1.7bn in tax (and brought a handy $20m in fees to KPMG).

The judges decided that KPMG had taken steps "designed to hide its tax shelter activities", and ordered the firm to disclose the names of its lucky clients that bought into the scheme. KPMG has now done so. The list of the "named and shamed" consists of 29 of the richest corporations in the world. Top of the list? Er, yes: AstraZeneca plc.

"Football's coming home – I'm being deported"

NEWS

AT THE end of May the Pentagon awarded a $293m contract for "co-ordination of security support" in Iraq to a British firm called Aegis Defence Services.

This "mother of all contracts" means Aegis will be responsible for "co-ordinating" more than 50 security firms operating in Iraq and providing its own forces for 75 "close protection teams" to protect US staff members of the "Project Management Office".

Astonishingly Aegis was not even on the US state department's list of recommended security companies in Iraq – the company has only been in existence for a year or so. Even more surprisingly, the company's chief executive is former British army officer turned soldier of fortune, Colonel Tim Spicer.

Spicer is best known for his role in the Sandline affair, when a company he founded shipped 30 tons of arms to Sierra Leone in contravention of a UN arms embargo. Spicer later told the press that the British government had encouraged his operation; and he then went on to write his memoirs, *An Unorthodox Soldier*, after nearly bringing down the prime minister.

The Pentagon must be hoping there isn't a re-run of the farcical situation in 1997 when Spicer received a $36m contract from the government of Papua New Guinea to put down an insurgency. Unfortunately for both the government and Spicer, the PNG army was so furious to learn that "the Colonel" was filling his pockets while ordinary soldiers couldn't fill their bellies that it – rather than the rebels – toppled the government and slapped Spicer in jail.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Big Brother Sinks to New Low on Night of Violence."

— *Daily Mail*, 18 June, p11.

"www.dailymail.co.uk. All your *Big Brother* latest — including pictures of that bust-up."

— *Daily Mail*, 18 June, p19.

FOUR years ago the oil giant BP promised to stop making political donations after its payments to American senators were revealed.

BP chief executive Lord Browne said the ban was necessary "to safeguard the legitimacy of the political process". But it doesn't seem to cover all political insiders. For BP is paying a former aide to US vice-president Dick Cheney to persuade his chums in Washington to give favours and concessions to the company.

The BP lobbyist is Andrew Lundquist, who served as Cheney's energy policy director until the summer of 2002. Before that Lundquist was executive director of Cheney's "energy taskforce", a secretive group that drew up the Bush administration's fuel and power policy. The supreme court is currently considering a case brought by campaigning groups demanding that Cheney releases the records of the task force, which they think will show that it was "unduly influenced" by industry lobbyists. The energy bill produced by this task force gives $17bn worth of subsidies to nuclear, oil and gas businesses.

Lundquist set up his own PR firm one day after he left government service. Last year BP paid him to lobby the White House and the senate on two issues – the "comprehensive energy bill", the same bill that came out of his task force report, and the Alaska natural gas pipeline. Although BP made a net profit last year of more than $10bn, it wants $2bn in subsidies and loan guarantees from the US taxpayer for the pipeline. Even the industry-friendly Bush administration is balking at the size of the proposed hand out, but no doubt Lundquist will be able to win it round.

"Next!"

Street of Shame

IN CONTRAST to most papers, the *Daily Express* was rather subdued in its coverage of the jailing of an England fan after drunken violence in Portugal.

"Executive yobs are shaming our team," was the headline over a brief un-bylined piece on page 5, which reported that "News of the drink-fuelled antics of the well-heeled troublemakers shocked their respectable families back in England."

One can only imagine how different a tone the paper's coverage might have taken were it still led by former football editor Rob Shepherd. He, however, parted company from the paper six months ago when he was imprisoned for… drunkenly attacking a fellow drinker in a bar.

ONE factor behind the drop in the *Mirror*'s circulation under Piers Moron was a sudden reduction in "bulk sales" – ie giveaways. This owed less to a principled refusal to avoid such dubious methods of inflating the ABC figures than to the successful takeover of the Bhs chain by Philip Green.

Green inherited a promotion whereby large bundles of free *Mirrors* were placed in the self-service restaurant in every store. Green scrapped the scheme, with dire consequences for the paper's circulation.

But now Green has started a new promotion, this time disgorging thousands of copies of the *Express* titles – the only difference being that the *Express* is "sold" for 10p with each meal instead of being handed out for nothing. Even so, the additional sales will certainly flatter the *Express*'s top-line circulation, as they did for the *Mirror*.

Naturally this has had no influence on the high-quality analysis in the *Express*'s City pages – "Green a winner whatever the result", etc, etc – of his attempt to take over Marks & Spencer.

BACK in 1998 the *Eye* revealed that David "The Slug" Sullivan was flogging herbal sex-pills which could easily be confused by unwary customers with Viagra, but were nothing of the sort. Now, curiously, Sullivan's *Sport* newspapers keep running articles promoting a website offering Kamagra, a supposed "generic Viagra".

It is, of course, illegal to supply prescription only drugs – whether generic or not – in this way, and customs officers regularly intercept parcels sent from outside the UK containing such items. There's no mention of any of this in the *Sport* copy, which tends to appear under the headline "How they keep it up", and usually beside a large pair of breasts (natural or generic).

"Generic means that it is an exact copy of branded products like Viagra," the paper insists. According to *Daily Sport* medical correspondent Dr James Spindles, "the active ingredient of Kamagra, Sildenafil, is an enzyme inhibitor causing the blood vessels in your penis to dilate…" Sildenafil citrate is indeed the active ingredient in Viagra but it is only supposed to be prescribed, either in brand name or generic form, after a thorough medical examination.

The constant repetition of this "news" item might suggest that the newspaper has some sort of financial relationship with the people behind the website. But given Sullivan's great respect for the forces of law and order (boosted immeasurably by the miscarriage of justice which led to his stay in one of HM's prisons, until his lawyers cleared things up with the filth) this is clearly inconceivable.

AS EVER the *Sun*'s TV hacks had to be at their sycophantic best when a new ITV vehicle for Ross Kemp (aka Mr Rebekah Wade) hit the screens.

Julia Francis described *Line in the Sand* as "a gripping drama" and controversially informed readers that "Ross, who is now filming a third series of SAS drama *Ultimate Force*, liked playing a character who isn't afraid to give in to his emotions."

On both nights that the drama was broadcast, Sara Nathan managed to include it as Best Drama in her "What to Watch" column, assuring *Sun* readers that it was "gripping stuff". If only the critics and the public had agreed...

The *Express* dismissed it as "a load of old twaddle" and the *Telegraph* thought it "tosh". Although six million viewers did initially switch on for the prime time "thriller", that figure had dropped by a million within half an hour and was down to four million by the second instalment.

Still, it's nice to see Rebekah's craven hacks doing all they can to justify the £1.5m pouring into the Wade-Kemp household every year from ITV.

Number crunching

3,000

■ Number of football fans banned from travelling to Euro 2004 because of risk of violence

3,000,000

■ Number of extra viewers who watched *Big Brother* last Thursday on the promise of violence between housemates

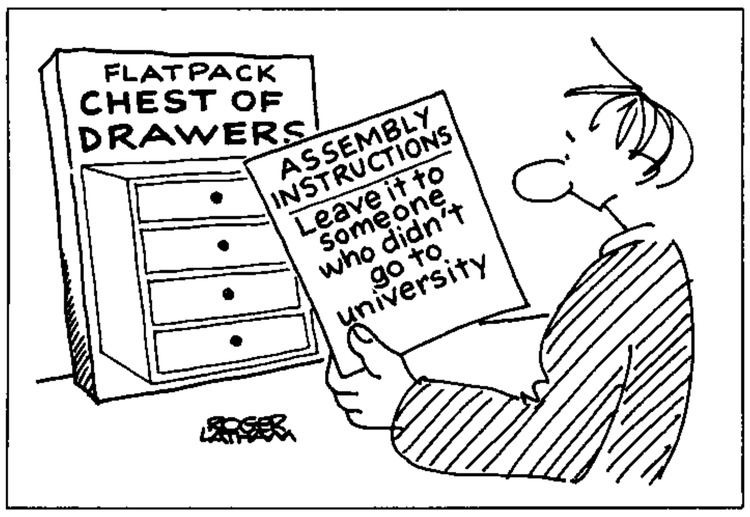
PRESS adverts for the Albery Theatre's revival of Tennessee William's *Suddenly Last Summer* maintain that the *Daily Telegraph* wrote "An outstanding cast headed by Diana Rigg and Victoria Hamilton", a half-sentence which surely begs for closure.

The *Eye* is happy to oblige: Charles Spencer concluded "…who mostly give the game impression that they take this preposterous piece seriously, though I couldn't help noticing that Rigg spends much of the show with her face hidden in her shawl, as if suffering agonies of understandable embarrassment. The play is not so much a modern tragedy as an entertaining example of the highest tosh."

THE *Guardian*'s Weekend magazine delivered an uncharacteristic brown-nosing to Microsoft in its recent serialisation of Madeleine Bunting's book *Willing Slaves*, devoting a 500-word section to "the giant the others strive to match."

"On summer afternoons the company offers free ice creams and picnic rugs to its employees," reported Bunting breathlessly. "A wall chart shows how identifying your strengths leads to good work, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction, which leads to profit increases, and finally stock-price increases: a perfect merging of individual and organisational goals."

It also leads to increased revenue for the *Guardian*, as the adjacent full-page ad for Microsoft's latest Office software package demonstrated.



The Curse of Gnome

IT IS with a profound sense of inevitability that we report the death on 4 June of Kevin Alphonsus Dooley, aged 61, the crooked Merseyside lawyer whose glittering career went downhill after he won "substantial" damages for libel against *Private Eye* in 1994.

Described by the local press as a "colourful" solicitor – a euphemism in this case for "bent" – Dooley's high-profile clients included numerous professional footballers, including the former Liverpool players Kenny Dalglish, Graeme Souness and Robbie Fowler, and Everton's Duncan Ferguson. He was also the solicitor of choice for notorious *Sunday Times* rich-listed drugs baron Curtis Warren and gangster-turned-author Charlie Seiga, aka "the Teflon don" because he has never been to prison.

Dooley also represented the Police Federation and several former Merseyside chief constables, one of whom, the late Sir Kenneth Oxford, once had a £20,000 interest free loan from Dooley. Another big pal was the late George Carman QC, who frequently watched Liverpool play at Anfield with free tickets supplied by Dooley.

In 1994 Dooley and two business partners, nightclub owner Henry "H" Williams and the then Liverpool manager Roy Evans, successfully sued the *Eye* over an article about their involvement in a scheme for a giant rubbish dump in Kirkby. All three received substantial damages. This episode, however, marked a watershed. The Curse of Gnome was upon Dooley and it was downhill thereafter.

Throughout the 1990s Dooley was up to his neck in a bank investment scam, which promised returns to the gullible – including footballers Robbie Fowler and Stan Collymore – of 1,400 percent. In June 2000 the Law Society closed down his offices and suspended him. In 2002 he was struck off for dishonesty and conduct unbefitting a solicitor following a hearing of the solicitors disciplinary tribunal. The tribunal heard that between 1995 and 2000 he took part in 19 fraudulent investment schemes involving many millions of pounds with a conman called John Silver, who by that time was in prison. Investors lost hundreds of thousands of pounds, but in one "deal" Dooley's fee alone was £1m.

Meanwhile Dooley was at the centre of a corruption probe centred on Liverpool magistrates court, where he was said to have handed out gifts and football tickets in exchange for favours. Two judges and four senior clerks were also implicated, but later cleared.

After Dooley's death the only person quoted by the *Liverpool Post* with a good word for him was Charlie Seiga, the former armed robber. "Kevin represented me and was a well-established character amongst the legal profession. Although I had not seen him for a while, my thoughts and prayers are with his family at this tragic time," he said. The only lawyer willing to say anything about him was rentaquote Liverpool solicitor Rex Makin. He said: "He caused terrible trouble for the legal profession. It was absolutely dreadful. His advocacy skills were useless, yet he attracted such big names." The day after, the *Liverpool Post* cravenly apologised for printing Makin's remarks after protests from readers.

Such was the rise and fall of the "solicitor to the stars". Oh ye dodgy lawyers – look upon the works of Gnome, and tremble.

YELLAND WATCH

OLD Murdoch employees never die, they are just given a nice big office somewhere else in the News Corporation empire in the hope that it will keep them quiet.

In the case of ex-*Sun* editor David Yelland, a business course at Harvard University got him out of the way for nine months before he returned to Britain for the dizzy heights of... a weekly column in the *Times* business section. Yelland, however, never quite gave up hope of promotion, and devoted much of his 800-words a week to shameless brown-nosing in the hope that the boss would one day remember him...

19 September 2003: The biggest story in the business world is the departure of BSkyB chief executive Tony Ball. New boy Yelland – who is being mooted as a candidate to replace Ball by some pundits – chooses instead to devote his column to the problems faced by the Tory party. "Step one, change the boss," he declares. "I believe the Tory party is a classic turnaround challenge... A simple message repeated by a strong leader could effect a historic turnaround." Sadly another strong leader is not for turning – James Murdoch gets the Sky job.

26 September: Yelland wades in to defend a controversial multi-millionaire in the entertainment business who maintains a dignified silence under fire. "As I keep on saying, not reacting to bitter criticism is not easy, but it is – in Britain – often the only thing you can do." He's talking about Andrew Lloyd-Webber, of course.

3 October: Yelland writes in defence of fat cats. "Why does Corporate Britain get such a bad press?" he demands. "In this country you will be attacked for being successful, being wealthy, or being American – but if you fit into all three camps you really are in trouble." He omits to mention whether becoming American simply for business purposes makes matters worse.

10 October: The Carlton/Granada merger has been given the go-ahead by the government. Cometh the hour, cometh the man, reckons Yelland. "What will happen now is that the ITV corporate floor will splinter, bringing about the inevitable takeover from one of America's media giants... Many of these giants started off very small and were built to global strength by innovative visionaries. Would it not have been nice to hear Charles Allen or Michael Green talk with the ambition of a young Rupert Murdoch?"

24 October: Michael Green has been ousted by Carlton shareholders, much to Yelland's dismay. "'Shareholder action' is on the march... Surely they would admit that a Microsoft without Bill Gates would be less successful, even though Gates has almost unchecked power within his company and around the world. You could say the same about Redstone, or Lords Hanson and King, and certainly the late Lord White, or Nike's Phil Knight, or Henry Ford for that matter."

You could also say it about Rupert Murdoch, who is facing a stormy reception at the BskyB AGM, but Yelland doesn't. Instead he issues a dark warning: "The pendulum of corporate governance could swing too far towards the fund managers and away from that Holy Grail of business: the risk-taking, creative-sparking entrepreneurs." Who could he have in mind?

19 December: "The best business leaders sometimes receive less than flattering press," muses Yelland. "Jack Welch at GE was a 'control freak', Lord Hanson was an 'asset stripper', BP's Lord Browne of Madingley is a 'fat cat' and, dare I say, Rupert Murdoch is portrayed as even worse." But not in this column, that's for sure.

23 January 2004: In the wake of the Hutton inquiry, Yelland confesses to a youthful indiscretion: "I admired the BBC. I loved it." Now, however, he has seen the error of his ways. "In a digital world, where the BBC must compete internationally, it has been exposed globally as a third-class outfit with third-class people." Far better for any one with anything to tell the world to go elsewhere – like George W. Bush has: "The President has yet to give an in-depth interview to *The New York Times* while in office, which is both bold and brilliant... Who has he seen? Trevor Kavanagh, of the *Sun*, and Brit Hume, of Fox News, both, of course, employees of The News Corporation."

26 March: Yelland's pitching is getting shameless now. "Blue Sky thinking, the concept brought to prominence in this country by ex-BBC Director-General Lord Birt, is not as common as it should be in British business. Keeping one or two MBAs or such in a room close to the chief executive's office suite – removed from either the R&D department or strategic planning – is quite common in the US. These bright souls usually have titles such as 'Special Assistant to the Chief Executive' and so on." Go on David, bang on the wall and make sure you've got Rupert's attention...

2 April: Murdoch gets a week off as Yelland offers his PR help to another tragically misunderstood minority: the gays. "As a community, Britain's gay men and women don't get their message across – partly because leaders such as Peter Tatchell show aggression instead of humanity... Britain's gays punch way over their weight in terms of creativity, taxes paid and business and political acumen. Trouble is, they cannot say that without themselves making an issue of their sexuality. One day we will grow up sufficiently to realise this is just not an issue. Who cares, anyway?" Well, one tabloid editor cared enough in November 1998 to demand of the Prime Minister: "Tell us the truth Tony – ARE WE BEING RUN BY A GAY MAFIA? The public has a right to know." But as Yelland confesses: "I did make errors in this area early on. My record is not perfect."

30 April: Yelland is impressed by the results announced by Camelot's chief executive. "Dianne Thompson, take a bow. Here is living proof that it is possible to forge a comeback even if parts of the media come hunting for your head." Rupert, are you listening? *Rupert?*

7 May: Look, he wouldn't even ask for all that much cash: "Since I left the *Sun* last year I've had cause to travel around the country, visiting most of our major cities. I've gladly done so in slightly more humble circumstances than when editing – gone is the chauffeur-driven limo (which I never took to anyway) and I now regularly use trains, tubes and even Ken Livingstone's excellent bendy buses. I only realise how insulated from real life I was as Editor now I have left the job."

21 May: Yelland's patience is beginning to run out. "The companies that suffer real disasters are those whose remuneration policies have not been thought through," he warns darkly in his column. "Often these are companies where an arrogant management doesn't realise the power of the press."

5 June: Alas! Yelland has finally given up on the dream, and announced that after 14 years of loyal service he is leaving News Corporation to work for PR firm Weber Shandwick. In a parting interview with the *Guardian*, he wistfully muses on what might have been. "I edited the *Sun* because Rupert Murdoch asked me to do it. But if he had asked me to jump off Beachy Head I probably would have done it."

As long as his [David Beckham's] head fits on his neck the way it does, as long as his neck connects to his shoulders and his hips to his thighs the way they do, as long as he is fleet and graceful, as long as his smile breaks the way it does, we'll be watching him.

GERMAINE GREER
Daily Telegraph

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

IN THE TEAROOM

EVERYONE in the tearoom has been trying to read the prime minister's mind. Will he go or will he stay?

Those who know his psychology best agree that in the end, it will all come down to the question of trust. The prime minister can't trust the civil service. He can't trust the intelligence services. He certainly can't trust his chancellor, nor most of the rest of the cabinet for that matter. He can't trust increasing numbers of his backbenchers. And now he can't trust the British people. So whom can he trust?

The PM has had the bean-counters from his delivery unit down to Chequers. So what are the headline success stories he can use in the election campaign to prove that "new" Labour has turned around the public services?

Er, the waiting list for operations is down a bit. But the waiting list to get on to the waiting list is growing apace. So not a huge improvement there. Some primary school kids can read and write now, though a quarter still leave school barely able to do so. So not much to shout about there either. As for transport, the good news is still stuck in traffic somewhere. Only one thing for it: the prime minister is going to have to take charge of this agenda himself – even if it means more of those scars on his back – and sort out the mess before the election.

Then there's the EU constitution. According to plan A, Gordon was supposed to have taken charge by the referendum date in 2006, so you'd think he'd volunteer to sell the wretched thing in the meantime. Fat chance of that. Charles Clarke can't hack it. Jack Straw's just as tepid as Gordon. So the PM is going to have to write his own page in the history books, as per bloody usual.

Of course if Cherie ever thought he'd become a liability, he'd quit tomorrow. And does she? She's just about lost it with the smug-faced Brownites who've been making no secret of enjoying Tony's recent discomfort and thinks the bastards should be made to wait another hundred years. So that's it then. Settled. There's a job of work to do.

'Quintus Slide'

TRANSPORT minister Kim Howells may come to regret his comments in a recent BBC documentary about the 1984 miners' strike.

As research officer of the South Wales National Union of Mineworkers at the time, he recalled, he started hastily shredding union records when a taxi driver taking a strike-breaker to work was killed by a concrete block dropped from a bridge.

This admission aroused the interest of Dai Knacker. After grilling the minister, South Wales police have now sent a file to the crown prosecution service. Howells will return to Pontypridd next month to hear whether he's to be charged with perverting the course of justice.

Reaganballs

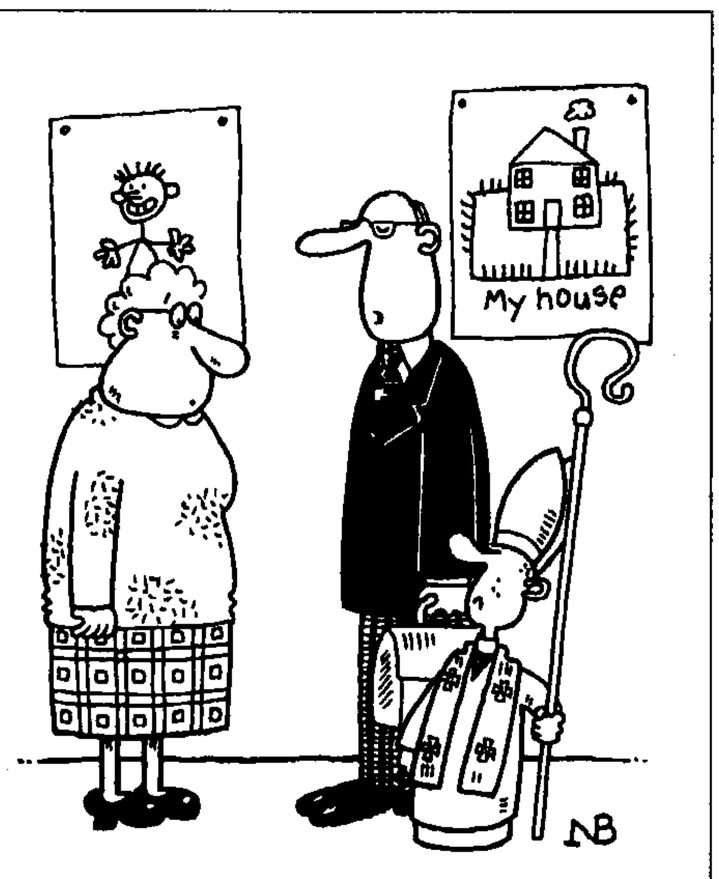
"We are calling on marketers to consider the mood of the country on this day of national mourning, indeed, many member companies plan to refrain from calling or sending commercial emails."

—H. Robert Wientzen, President, US Direct Marketing Association

THE Dear Leader may soon rue the day he appointed former Scottish minister and Maxwell-era *Mirror* executive Helen Liddell as governor-general of Australia.

He sent Liddell to Canberra to free up her Airdrie & Shotts constituency for health secretary John "the hammer" Reid, whose Motherwell seat disappears at the next election. Reid is busy "sewing up" the constituency, while Liddell is measuring for curtains down under. But did anyone tell Tony Blair that he is only able to make one "grace and favour" appointment, and that in future all others have to come through a royal commission?

Just think of those cronies who might have benefited from the prime minister's lavender list instead of Liddell! Poor old Peter, Philip and Alastair – how furious they will be when they discover the chief has ballsed up again!



"Your objection to my client's religious dress breaches his human rights"

LABOUR has devised a novel way to get rid of unwanted parliamentary candidates and make way for Blairite wannabes. It now bars them *after* they have been selected by local constituencies.

Party panjandrums were aghast when popular local councillor Linda Riordan was selected by local members to stand in Halifax – even more so when they realised Riordan not only worked for the retiring leftie MP for the same seat, Alice Mahon, but was her nextdoor neighbour too.

The seat had been earmarked for Jo Coles, a special adviser to Yvette Cooper; but Coles limped to third place in the selection. A few weeks later, though, Riordan was summarily despatched by a Labour NEC committee and told she could not stand because her "presentational skills" weren't up to scratch. Riordan was told she could tell the press she had decided to "withdraw as candidate" in a "face-saving exercise".

Now facing the wrath of Riordan's union, Amicus (which recently gave £500,000 to "new" Labour), party HQ promises to rerun the selection. Officials will allow Riordan to stand again – while doing their utmost to ensure she doesn't win a second time.

A PERSONAL letter from the Vicar of St Albion graced the front page of the 150th anniversary edition of the *Oldham Evening Chronicle* last month. In particular, the Rev Blair praised the paper's efforts to improve community spirit in the town – mentioning this no fewer than four times in eight paragraphs.

Alas! Only a few days later the *Chronicle* reported the findings of a select committee looking at social cohesion in the town in the wake of the riots. One culprit – condemned by the committee for "publishing unsigned letters which often contain extreme [racist] views" – was, er, the *Chronicle*.

Number crunchings

33% ■ Average share of vote for "resurgent" Tories under Michael Howard in local and Euro elections, 2004

37% ■ Average share of vote for failed Tories under William Hague in local and Euro elections, 1999

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

"FIRE doors are coming off their hinges... The build-up of heat brings learning to a halt... The corridors are bleak and sterile... "We are not allowed to put up displays... We are not allowed to fix anything [such as, say, climbing bars] to gym hall walls."

These are just some of the responses from 60 of Scotland's privately-financed new or refurbished schools in 21 different LEAs garnered in a survey by the Educational Institute of Scotland and the Royal Incorporation of Architects. The report doesn't name the schools or shame the specific companies involved in the public finance initiative (PFI) or public private partnership (PPP) deals, but the results show what a shambles the projects have been.

Heating and lighting problems recur. But schools also report having to use staff rooms for classes; being unable to use sports facilities for 12 weeks of the school year because there are no other rooms suitable for exams; and several school halls are too small for assembly or unsuitable for pupil performances.

One secondary school reported that it was unable to unpack its new science equipment since the new building didn't have enough storage space. "Not even our tallest teacher can reach the cupboards," reported another. Teachers also highlight the problem of private firms hiring out space in the schools at night and weekends but without proper supervision. "Lots of PE equipment has walked," says one. "Displays [of pupils' work] have been spoiled," says another.

"The new building has had the net effect of reducing both in breadth and depth the educational experience available," concludes PFI-refurbished "School F", which at the time of the survey in 2003 had been unable to use its water supply for several months. Its experience is echoed throughout the report.

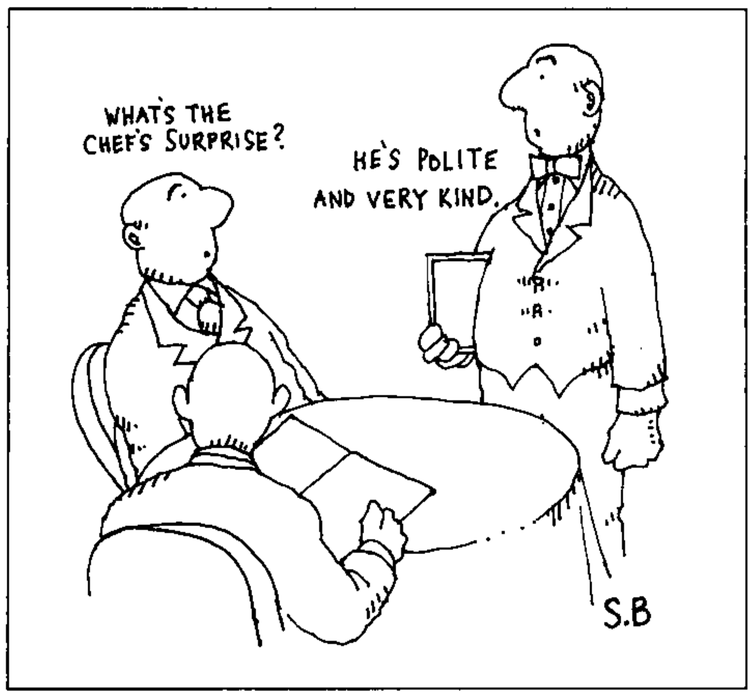
Meanwhile in Leeds, where £35m has been spent on seven new PFI schools, the council's "scrutiny board" has produced a report detailing problems with cramped classrooms, as well as offices, cloakrooms, storage space which are too small and corridors which don't comply with disability law.

PUPILS whose primary school was knocked down and rebuilt to make room for a giant Safeway store have had their outdoor play activities curtailed due to lack of space.

Lourdes Primary in Cardonald, near Glasgow, was rebuilt by Safeway in a £7m deal with Glasgow city council, which allowed it to build a superstore on the school's former prime plot of land.

The new building was finished earlier in the year and opened in April, with parents and teachers delighted by the new indoor space, especially since the old building had needed £1m of repairs. But the new outdoor space has been a different matter entirely: children were stopped from kicking around balls or using skipping ropes in it for safety reasons.

"It's like a thin corridor, rather than a playground," said Donna Cameron, whose six-year-old son attends the school. "When the school opened, I asked my son to show me the playground and he said 'we're in it'. I thought he had got it wrong."



DOWN ON THE FARM

NO ONE can say Defra isn't tireless in its efforts to get into the *Guinness Book of Records*.

One of its proudest moments was when, in response to the 2001 foot and mouth crisis, it managed to kill a record nine million healthy farm animals. But now it has a new target: a plan to slaughter and burn 23 million healthy lambs – an entire year's crop – if scientists can somehow manage to find a single sheep infected with BSE.

Once again we are entering the twilight world of the longest-running farce in British agriculture. To recap on how surreal this story has become, we must remember that there is still not a shred of proof to connect eating BSE-infected beef with CJD. Indeed, as CJD figures continue to decline, the evidence seems only to confirm that such a link never existed. But once the BSE-hysteria was unleashed, it opened up for the scientists the prospect of unlimited funding if they could keep the scare going. And one lucrative sideline soon became the search to find BSE in animals other than old cows.

Their prize target was to find BSE in sheep, which had for centuries been susceptible to a related brain-disease, scrapie. There was brief excitement when they thought they had found BSE in sheep, only to discover that they had muddled up sheep's brains with those taken from BSE-infected cattle. But this did not deter them from the quest. The only problem was that, try as they might, they just could not find a single BSE-infected sheep.

Then the EU entered the act. Just in case a link might one day be found, Brussels agreed to a "National Scrapie Plan". Millions of sheep must be tested to see which were genetically most likely to contract scrapie. Steps would then be taken to stop those animals breeding, to eliminate the "killer gene" from the national flock. But, with their eye still on the real prize, the scientists then came up with a brilliant new theory. It has only proved impossible to find BSE in sheep, they say, because it might have been "masked" by the more obvious signs of scrapie.

Armed with this new thesis, Defra submitted to Brussels a new "contingency plan", without revealing what it had in mind to Britain's 70,000 sheep farmers. But when it called in the press to explain the new strategy, one official, Michael Beuler, let slip that, if BSE were ever found in sheep, Defra might order the killing of every lamb in Britain, 23 million in all, then forbid farmers from allowing their sheep to breed for two years.

When farmers asked whether their lambs would be tested before being slaughtered, Defra said this would be too expensive, and anyway Brussels wouldn't allow it. So Defra's policy is now that, if that holy grail is ever found, its officials will be quite happy to kill 23 million fluffy little lambs, even if they are all perfectly healthy, and see the collapse of Britain's sheep industry.

The one bright spot is that, since sheep do not catch mad cow disease, such an insane disaster is unlikely to materialise. But when the scientists have already shown themselves capable of mistaking sheep brains with those of cattle, who can bank on it?

'Muckspreader'

THE GONG SHOW

THE Queen's birthday honours contained the traditional rewards for failure. They included a knighthood for the outgoing chairman of BNFL, Hugh Collum – just two days after the company announced losses of £303m.

The results were merely the latest of Collum's remarkable achievements. As chairman he also oversaw the scandal of BNFL's faked fuel results and the collapse of plans to privatise the firm. A source close to BNFL tells the *Eye* that once he knew the knighthood was in the bag, Collum daringly wrote a farewell letter to the board members advising them to resist the "straitjacket of DTI oversight" – much to the amusement of managers who never saw Collum do the same until his gong was safe. BNFL's spokesmen tells the *Eye* he is not aware of such a letter, although if it did exist it would be confidential.

Another faithful public servant, **John Weiss**, senior manager at the export credit guarantee department (ECGD), became a Companion of the Order of Bath (CB). Weiss was acting chief executive of the ECGD when it backed the Baku-Tbilsi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, a BP scheme criticised for its human rights and environmental effects.

Meanwhile those already blessed with wealth were again showered with honours. **Fred Goodwin**, chief executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland, earns £1,916,000, has cut 18,000 jobs and now has a knighthood. Labour's affection for the job-cutter may stem from the fact that Royal Bank of Scotland is the top financier of the private finance initiative (PFI), with £1.5bn invested in chancellor Gordon Brown's schemes.

Vodafone boss **Julian Horn-Smith** grabbed a £1,897,000 salary last year. But now, thanks to his "services to international mobile telecoms", it's arise *Sir* Julian, knight of the text message.

Stelio Stefanou, the millionaire chief executive and majority owner of Accord, a privatisation specialist, got an OBE. Stelio is close to Labour and employs former Labour leader of Camden council Richard Arthur as a director. ("King" Arthur is simultaneously chairman of 4Ps, a think tank promoting local government privatisation.) Three months ago Accord was fined £100,000 plus £32,183 costs by the health and safety executive (HSE) because of the death in 2001 of one of its road workers. Joseph Jenkinson was run over and killed by a slow reversing agricultural trailer, but the HSE found that basic safety measures weren't in place.

John Roberts, the £688,000-a-year chairman of United Utilities, the privatised water firm, also got an OBE. According to the environment agency, United Utilities received seven fines for pollution last year. United lead the international privatisation of water supply: in Bolivia it worked with Bechtel on a water scheme that led to riots in the street.

Severn Trent Water managing director **Brian Duckworth** (£362,000 salary) got an OBE too, but not presumably in recognition of his firm's environment agency fines. These included a prosecution for turning one brook blue last year, and filling another with oil. **Pamela Taylor**, chief executive of Water UK, the trade body for these private water firms and a tireless lobbyist for price rises, got an OBE.

There was an OBE too for **Ann Gloag**, squillionaire part-owner of Stagecoach, apparently for her charitable works and not her firm's skill in sucking up subsidy from the government.

There was also a good showing for the arms makers. **Geoffrey Cooper**, managing director of high-tech warplane firm Cobham, got an OBE, as did **John Ferrie**, managing director of the Smiths Group. This firm sells high-tech warplane parts, including those for the Apache helicopters sold to Israel. (Ferrie's firm recently hired former Labour minister and ex-Nato chief Lord Robertson.) **Dr Sally Howes**, director-general of the main defence-industry lobby organisation, the Society of British Aerospace Manufacturers, also bagged an OBE.

Trebles all round!

OF COURSE it's the awards for unsung heroes – "little people", as Yasmin Alibhai Brown calls them – that give the honours list its charm. People such as Sharon Golze, the Don Valley High School administrative officer who got an MBE.

In 1991 Sharon was a lowly school secretary at Edlington when the local education authority started to appoint middle-ranking education department officials as principal administrative officers. Mrs Golze was the only humble school secretary to claim one these highly-paid new jobs. Naturally she was a bit out of her depth at first, and she had to be trained up by Conisbrough Northcliffe's admin officer, Sue Larkin, who was considered something of an expert.

Soon afterwards the Don Valley job came up: a bigger school and a lot more money; and Larkin was called for interview. Imagine her surprise discovering that her former student Sharon Golze was on the shortlist. Even more surprising, perhaps, Golze got the job!

By a remarkable coincidence Mrs Golze is the daughter of disgraced former council leader Gordon Gallimore, who at the time of Mrs Golze's appointments was running Britain's most corrupt council on a basis of crude patronage. The Don Valley governing body of the time was stuffed with Gallimore's assorted criminal mates.

Down On The Fish Farm

ACCORDING to the front page of the Scottish *Sunday Post* last month (23 May), Tony Blair was involved in "moves to protect salmon jobs".

It was claimed that he had "persuaded the EU to introduce measures to prevent Norway from dumping thousands of tonnes of cheap farmed salmon in Europe, under-cutting Scottish prices and putting Scottish firms out of business", and it was complete balderdash. As was confirmed next day when a Scottish Executive (SE) spokesman said: "Negotiations between the EU and other member states are continuing. No decision has been taken."

The story was pure electioneering, no doubt leaked to the press by the SE itself. Blair was alleged to have been "furious when told of the problem and spoke to the Finnish Prime Minister and Silvio Berlusconi, the Prime Minister of Italy".

According to the report, trade and industry minister Mike O'Brien was also busy, "contacting his counterparts in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Belgium to gain their support". And SE fisheries minister Allan Wilson got in his two penny-worth too: "This move will prevent Norway from dumping their farmed salmon on us. Tony Blair has been tremendous on this. As soon as he heard of the threat, he acted to save Scottish jobs."

Never slow to suck up, Western Isles MSP Alasdair Morrison said that he had also asked Mr Blair to help: "He has a remarkable depth of knowledge about the industry. Last week, he was questioned on it by one of my constituents. Tony Blair spoke about fish farming for three-and-a-half minutes. It was really impressive."

What really is impressive is that these people don't realise there is no such thing as a "Scottish" fish farm industry. Fish farming in Scotland is controlled by Norwegian and Dutch companies. Marine Harvest Europe, for example, is part of the Dutch conglomerate Nutreco which dominates Scotland's fish farms and also operates in Norway and Chile.

Such companies are unlikely to accept spurious "protectionism" lying down. Oslo-based Fjord Seafood, one of the top five aquaculture companies in the world, has already set alarm bells ringing. Fjord's Scottish farms lost £2.5m in the last quarter of 2003 alone. Fjord world-wide president, Helge Midttun said that his company could lose up to an additional £5m if sanctions were passed.

It doesn't take degree in business economics to guess what these companies will do, or where they will relocate to, if they start haemorrhaging even more money in Scotland because of sanctions.

'Old Trout'

FIVE ITV

Euro 2004 (BBC1)
Euro 2004 (ITV1)

BECAUSE television has tended to be run by football-loving men – Grade and Dyke have boardroom experience; Liddiment and Salmon hung soccer shirts on their office wall; Birt and Dyke played five-a-side every Friday – little executive attention has been given to the fact that the game has rarely delivered in ratings terms.

In recent years Sky, ITV and the BBC have all paid way over the odds for exclusive live action or highlights from premiership games without being rewarded with the audiences they hoped for. Ironically, the one time that the sport does lure the vast majority of available viewers – during live England matches in international tournaments – is on the occasions when the game is shared between the main terrestrial broadcasters, with no one able to buy a decisive advantage.

Even so, despite the long evidence that ratings for international football depend on the level of external interest rather than the quality of internal content, BBC1 and ITV1 treated the first week of Euro 2004 as a war, as if England v Switzerland or England v Croatia were hot new television formats which the public had to be persuaded to watch.

The level of self-promotion by both sides was higher than ever. You were scarcely into one game before the commentator or a caption would yell the date and time of the next big game on this channel. In a very rare example in telly of knocking copy, ITV1 even ran one campaign which mocked the arty ads being run by the BBC featuring paintings of star players. The huckstering reached the ultimate level when, during a quiet moment in one Greek game, Steve Wilson used the fact that one team had a player from AEK Athens to advise that "it's only 68 days until Athens hosts the Olympic games live on the BBC."

The biggest change since the 2002 world cup has been in the bloke-in-the-box role: the pundit who sits beside the live commentator during the game. With ITV's Big Ron sacked for racism and the BBC's Trevor Brooking having taken a desk job at the Football Association, both broadcasters were auditioning in the sidekick position.

Both Big Ron and Trev were frequently mocked during their tenures – for corniness and dullness respectively – but their replacements have proved right the old song that you don't know what you've got til it's gone. The problem with the sidekick role is that you neither want someone who will overshadow the commentator nor to waste a pundit who would be more useful in the live studio discussions. In retrospect, Ron and Trev negotiated their way brilliantly between these risks.

ITV1 went with Sir Bobby Robson. Perhaps dangerously, given that Big Ron's downfall resulted from not knowing when the microphone was on, Sir Bobby seems to have no idea when he's live and when he isn't. Although, in this case, the risk is not that he'll defame a racial grouping but that he goes through whole stretches of games without saying a word at all. And, when he does speak, it's as if he's muttering out of the side of his mouth in the hope of not being heard. You feel that he has taken the inevitable post-Big Ron advice to be "very careful what you say" rather too seriously.

Replacing Trevor Brooking should be an easier task but the BBC has made the mistake of going with Mark Lawrenson and Mick McCarthy, who both regard themselves as comedians but come close to this ambition only in having comedy accents.

The presence of this former Republic of Ireland player and manager in the BBC team touch on another of the BBC's difficulties. Conscious of having British as its first name, the corporation has always been nervous of sporting nationalism, although has faced the difficulty that, in recent times, only England has qualified for international competitions with any regularity.

BBC Radio 5 Live shows few such concerns, aiming itself squarely, during the last world cup and now Euro 2004, at the white vans flapping St George flags. On BBC television, the problem is that the natural first-choice line-up of pundits would comprise a Scot (Alan Hansen), a Dane (Peter Schmeichel) and the Irish Lawrenson.

For this tournament, the problem has been exacerbated by the addition of Gordon Strachan, so Scots as to be frequently incomprehensible to other ears. Admittedly, the BBC is in the rare position of having a former England captain as anchor in Gary Lineker – and we don't want a studio full of Little Ingerlanders – but, during the big England games, you can see the BBC visibly struggling with its responsibilities to four different nations. The fact that Scotland is now better at football punditry than football forces them to bring in their weakest chatterer, Ian Wright, for England matches.

ITV, in contrast, tends to go for the full English, although the commercial channel has problems with its main commentator. The late Brian Moore never became a character in the way that the BBC's John Motson did but Moore's replacement, Clive Tyldesley, is becoming just too peculiar in an almost Alan Partridge way.

During the England v France game, he not only warned that the referee was a "German dentist" (a clear suggestion, via Marathon Man, of Nazi tendencies) but made an oddly homoerotic reference to the size of the French coach's eyes. Like many involved, he's trying too hard when the awful truth is that it doesn't matter: the viewers go where the best games are.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

THE ideological composition of the "independent" panel hand-picked by culture secretary Tessa Jowell to review the BBC's charter is causing alarm among those who want to keep the current system of funding.

The panel includes Sly Bailey, the chief executive of Trinity Mirror who is admired by the City for her focus on the group's share price and her barely disguised desire to fatten up the business and sell it.

It also includes Tim Gardam, a former BBC and Channel 4 executive who has argued many times for a redistribution of licence revenue, possibly by "top slicing the BBC licence fee" and redistributing the lolly to the commercial sector. He has also argued for a "more distanced role for governors".

Then there is Sir Alan Budd, former chief economic adviser to the treasury. He helped draft the monetarist policies that Margaret Thatcher so admired and is currently deregulating the gambling industry.

Meanwhile Janet Finch, vice-chancellor of Keele University, will do exactly as she is told. Tony Blair appointed her to the Council for Science & Technology, a body so feeble it was acclaimed by a Commons select committee for being "almost invisible".

Finally there is Alice Rawsthorn, the director of the Design Museum and a former *FT* hack. Last October she told the *Independent* that "the best invention ever" is "electricity" and she came 100th in the Harpers & Queen Top 100 Best Dressed Women in Britain competition. Her views on public sector broadcasting are unknown.

TIMES may be hard at ITN after the loss of the Channel Five news contract to BSkyB, but a plaintive message posted on the ITV News website last week reveals just how bad things are:

"Do you have footage of breaking news that you caught on your 3G videophone, and did you know you can send it to us? It does not need to be very long – 20 seconds is quite enough, and the smaller your file, the easier it is to send."

WITH charter renewal coming up, the BBC is desperate to highlight any good news about its public service broadcasting remit. But any elevated sentiment is undermined by a continuing obsession with ratings.

For example, the latest buzz in *Ariel* is that "live TV coverage following the death of Ronald Reagan generated an unexpected level of public interest last week, garnering almost double the *Big Brother* audience when the events clashed".

So was it stately commentary or a sense of history that lured viewers from Channel 4's pisspoor reality show? No. According to head of television news Roger Mosey, it was the "visually attractive nature of the burial rituals".

Britain goes WILD
IF YOU'RE DESPERATE FOR RATINGS...
YOU FIND SOME STRANGE, FURRY LITTLE CREATURE...
THAT MAKES A FUNNY NOISE...
AND CREEPS ABOUT IN THE UNDERGROWTH...
THEN PUT HIM IN SOMETHING WITH ANIMALS
oh look, it's a tit
Ken Pyne

CHANNEL 4 was in contrite mood last week following its belated discovery that if you select a group of volatile people and spend three weeks winding them up and plying them with alcohol they will start fighting.

A joint statement by *Big Brother* producers Endemol and the network promised that "the welfare and safety of housemates is always our overriding concern" and that they had no interest in confrontations which "reached an unacceptable level".

This announcement arrived on the desks of entertainment hacks hot on the heels of another missive from Channel 4 giving details of the new series of *Wife Swap*, which promised that it was "set to be more outrageous than ever".

The first show, currently heavily trailed during episodes of *Big Brother*, will apparently feature "the show's biggest row" as a "foul-mouthed mum lets fly with a tirade of furious abuse in a furious bust-up".

PS: Can the Channel 4 boss who approved this shameless sleaze, Mark Thompson, by any chance be related to the urbane, civilised, devout new director-general of the BBC?

GOING LIVE

THERE was great illumination when Sky News went live on 15 June to Jonathan Samuels outside the school at the centre of the latest Muslim dress row.

"Have the school had anything to say?"

"No," replied Samuels. "The school has decided not to put anyone up for interview."

MORE than 300 people have complained to premium-rate phone services watchdog, the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS), after being billed for a connection to a premium-rate "adult" phone service in Moldova. The customers say the service was accessed by their computers without their knowledge or consent.

One *Eye* reader reports that he was billed £16 for a call made by his computer to Moldconecta SRL. His complaints to BT, the police and ICSTIS have got him nowhere. BT say they can only withhold payment if ICSTIS rules against the bills.

ICSTIS says it is somewhat stymied in its attempts to investigate, since "the details provided by consumers in respect of the service were limited". None of the 300 complainers who have contacted them in the past few months about Moldconecta have been able to provide any details of where the software, which enabled the computers to access the site, might have come from. Nor has anyone yet provided them with a copy of the software itself, although a very little effort on ICSTIS's part might have led them to computer security firms such as Symantec, who provide a "patch" to protect against the "malicious dialer" program, helpfully named Moldconecta.dialer.

Without the evidence the ICSTIS committee has decided not to adjudicate and will not be pursuing the cases any further. It advises people who want to protect themselves from such bills to contact their phone company and ask for premium rate call barring.

Malicious dialer programs are becoming increasingly common, often hidden in spam email or internet greetings cards and cleverly disguised so they are downloaded on to the computer without the user's knowledge. Some are created by premium-rate services themselves to illegally drum up business while others may be purely mischievous, as with other viruses. What is clear is that those who are billed have little comeback.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What implement is used to warn athletes that they are about to start the final lap?

Contestant: Starter gun.

Robinson: Which author of *Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire* shares his name with a long-armed ape?

Contestant: Gorilla.

Robinson: What fruit is used to produce the spirit brandy?

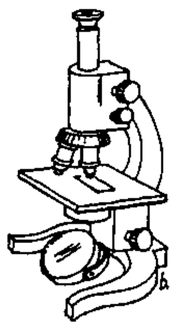
Contestant (*who went on to win*): Coconut.

The Vault, ITV

Melanie Sykes: What was the nickname given to Field Marshal Montgomery during the Second World War?

Contestant: Lord Haw Haw.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



SUMMER is here... and with it come yet more reports on global warming, this time inspired by the disaster movie *The Day after Tomorrow*, which has received saturation publicity thanks to its premise that the world is about to end.

The film is quite fun but its take on global warming bears as much resemblance to scientific reality as, say, *Godzilla* or *The Blob*. Nevertheless it received hundreds of column inches in every newspaper and was even name-checked in journals like *Nature* and *Science* and the slightly less august *New Scientist*.

These publications would never give the time of day to, say, the Tim Burton spoof *Mars Attacks!* in a serious discussion on the possible existence of microbes from the Red Planet, nor *Star Wars* when pondering the likelihood of alien civilisations. But when it comes to global warming, any science will do – even science from the makers of *Independence Day*.

Meanwhile, publication of survey results from the deepest ice core to date taken from the Antarctic ice cap have prompted yet more warmingballs. Eric Wolff and colleagues at the British Antarctic Survey have drilled nearly two miles into the ice to get a detailed snapshot of how the Earth's climate has changed in the past half a million years or so.

Over this period the planet has warmed and cooled in a series of glacial and inter-glacial periods. The levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere seem to track these changes, which is good, circumstantial but not definitive evidence for the global warming hypothesis. But despite the fact that CO_2 levels seem to be higher than for maybe half a million years, this is not proof that we are about to trigger a new ice age. Far from it.

Other ice core data, from Greenland, has shown that temperatures can go up and down dramatically with no changes in CO_2 and, as the geologists never tire of pointing out, Earth has been far, far warmer in the distant past than it is now.

At the time of the dinosaurs there was no ice at the poles and sea levels were hundreds of feet higher. And no one has yet found any fossils of petrol-slurping Cadillacs in the Cretaceous sediments.

'Boffin'

AD NAUSEAM

THE BBC's *Brassed-Off Britain* a fortnight ago was easily the year's least exciting poll: what do Britons find the most intensely irritating? Answer: direct marketing, aka junk mail.

This revelation has prompted much staged soul-searching within the industry, but so far very little action. A survey last week concluded that what DM really needed was a "rebranding", the adland equivalent of a Potemkin village.

"You have to rebrand or otherwise you're never going to get away from people's historic equation of direct marketing with floods of literature falling on your doorstep," said Robert Philips of Jackie Cooper PR. Rita Clifton, chairman of Martin Sorrell's Interbrand, helpfully suggested that the carpet-bombers might be encouraged "to rein in themselves".

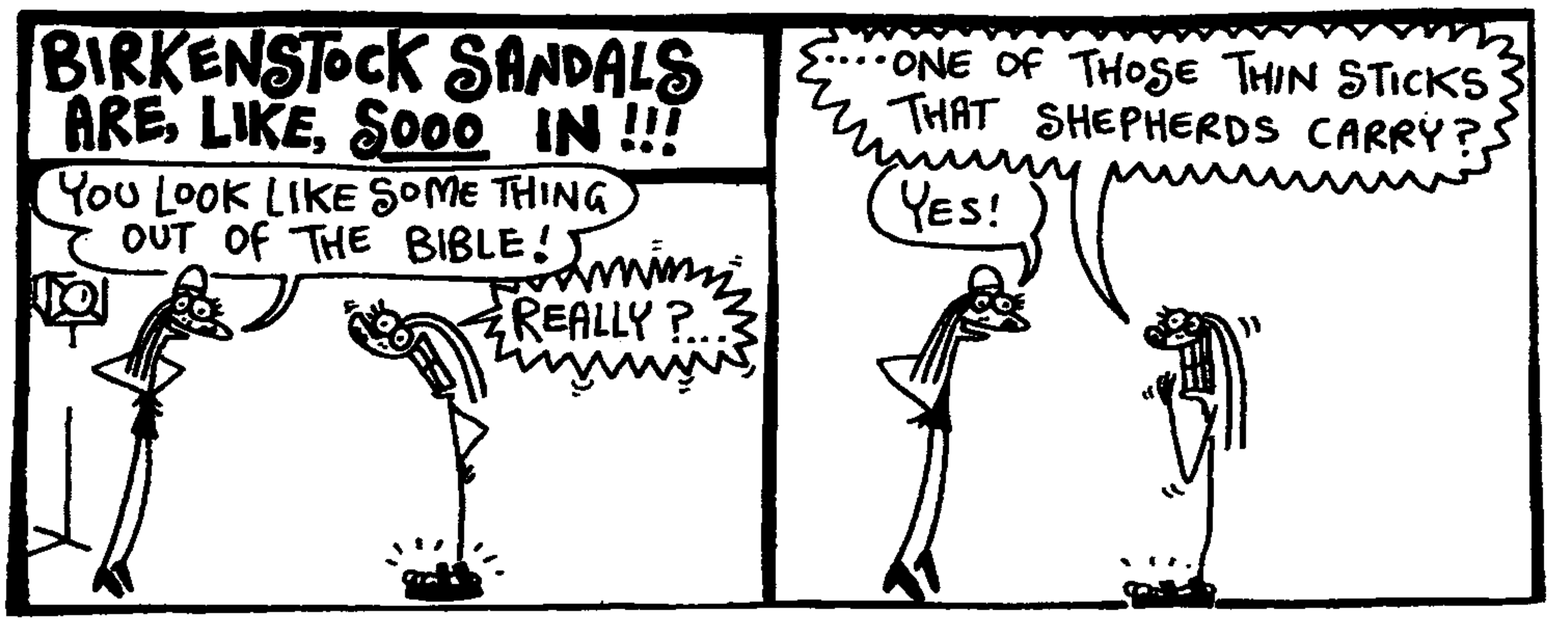
They're unlikely to rein themselves in given that they're making so much money: junk mail is growing faster than any other type of advertising. The sector grew by 6 percent in 2002, when all other forms of marketing activity were in freefall. At the same time, 69 percent of all junk mail is incorrectly addressed, regardless of whether that person wishes to receive it. It costs the Royal Mail £75m pounds to redeliver it, money which could be much better spent on sorting out its own pisspoor service. What the direct marketing industry needs is not rebranding but effective regulation. Over to you, Ofcom.

SO farewell, then, the McDonald's salad girls. As the burger behemoth takes flak from all sides for its part in the obesity epidemic, news reaches the *Eye* that its great advertising riposte — where "impatient Sophie", "Joanna who's always late", and "sensible Charlotte" imply that *Sex and the City* has come to the Peckham drive-thru – will not be repeated.

Why? "They did the job that was intended by communicating the range and the element of surprise for new people coming to the restaurants. We wanted them to be different, but you can't produce an ad that's universally liked," said John Hawkes, McDonald's chief head of marketing. Roughly translated, he means it wasn't just the *Eye* who received a postbag the size of a Mega Mac nominating this patronising twaddle for the year's Most Nauseating Ad.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


BIRKENSTOCK SANDALS ARE, LIKE, SOOO IN !!!
YOU LOOK LIKE SOME THING OUT OF THE BIBLE!
REALLY ?...
....ONE OF THOSE THIN STICKS THAT SHEPHERDS CARRY?
YES!

DOING THE ROUNDS

No Cutting Time

WOULD you want to be operated on by a newly qualified consultant surgeon? In a recent poll of the existing crop of senior surgeons, those most in a position to know, an alarming two-thirds said, er, no they wouldn't[1].

Further down the tree, the skill level of junior surgeons has been described as "very shallow."[2] The reasoning seems simple enough. In the old days, surgeons worked over 30,000 hours between senior house officer and consultant, gaining a huge amount of experience. Now, it's down to 8,000 hours and will, when the European working time directive comes into full force, fall to 6,000[3]. So new surgeons just don't get the cutting time to pass muster.

Alas, the "I worked 120 hours a week and it never did me any harm" argument doesn't stand up either. Medicine, and surgery in particular, is littered with the victims of self-imposed workaholism (hence the high percentage of depressed, divorced, alcoholic doctors). As surviving consultant surgeon David Reilly puts it: "There was no golden age of surgical training. There was certainly more time as a junior doctor; time to mature, or time to rot. And it was apparent that there was some staggeringly bad surgeons appointed under the old system, as well as some highly experienced and motivated ones."

Also, much of the 120-hour week of old was spent doing meaningless repetitive tasks, propping up the NHS and flying by the seat of your pants rather than receiving high-quality instruction from your consultant who often wasn't even in the hospital. However, to produce competent surgeons in a much shorter time, much emphasis and resource have to be given to improving the training, and in a ratings-obsessed NHS desperate to cut waiting lists in time for the next election, this isn't happening.

Despite lip service paid to "structured training, supervision and regular assessment", the largest ever survey of senior house officers in orthopaedic surgery found that a third were not taught at all in theatre or clinic[4]. This is all the more alarming when, by 2010, the NHS faces a 63 percent projected increase in knee replacements and a 22 percent increase in hip replacements. New Labour's short-term solution is to farm these operations out to treatment centres, private hospitals and overseas where there is no obligation to train NHS surgeons. So instead of growing our own talent, we may become totally dependent on the private sector and abroad.

Trainees often take longer to perform operations, and if a dedicated consultant is supervising them, he or she can't be operating elsewhere. But when the pressure to reduce lists is so great, training just doesn't happen. Consultants are also worried that they carry the can (ie position in the published league table) for their trainees' results, and so many are reluctant to let trainees take on anything but the simplest cases.

Even the Royal College of Surgeons has been forced to speak out. As president Sir Peter Morris says: "We have been pressing for dedicated training lists and clinics, regretfully without much success. To deliver training and ensure patient safety with the current staff shortages, existing trainers must be adequately supported with time to teach and train. This will inevitably impact on service throughput."

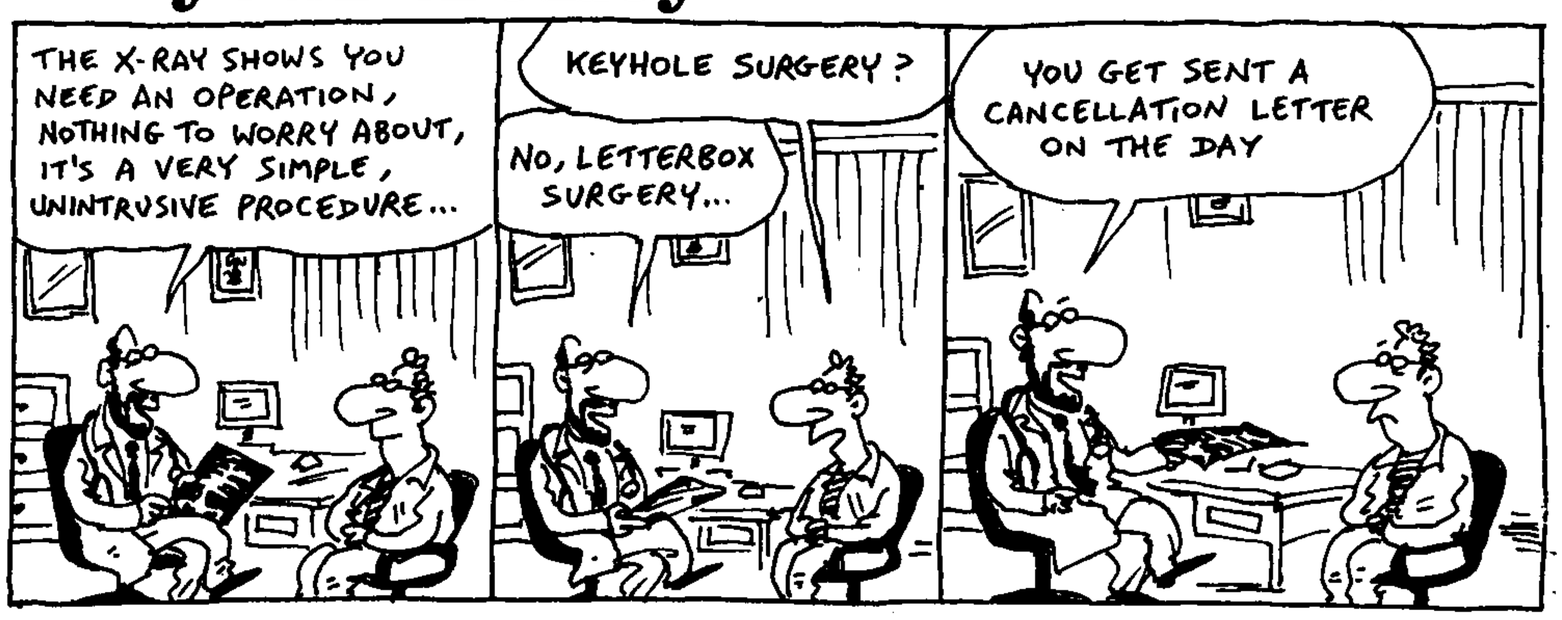
Alas, throughput trumps everything in the NHS and it's the most junior doctors who suffer. As ex-junior leader Paul Thorpe says: "There is a near total disregard by hospitals of the training needs of SHOs." The government can argue that there is no hard evidence that the current crop of new surgeons are any worse than in previous years, but alas in surgery there is very little hard evidence of anything. Despite the fall-out from the Bristol disaster and a clutch of incompetent gynaecologists, not nearly enough effort has gone into improving quality and safety. Instead, Tony Blair is obsessed with treating as many people as possible and offering patients choice to take up spare capacity. But if the choice is between three inexperienced surgeons who don't know what they're doing, is it worth having?

M.D.

1 Training in the Calman era: What consultants say *Ann R Coll Surg Eng*
2 An Audit of the Operative Skills of SHOs on BST programmes. *Ann R Coll Surg Eng*
3 No Time to Train Surgeons *British Medical Journal* 2004; 328: 418-9
4 Education and Training for SHOs. *British Orthopaedic Association* 2002

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


THE X-RAY SHOWS YOU NEED AN OPERATION, NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, IT'S A VERY SIMPLE, UNINTRUSIVE PROCEDURE...
KEYHOLE SURGERY?
NO, LETTERBOX SURGERY...
YOU GET SENT A CANCELLATION LETTER ON THE DAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

WHY has Virgin devoted half the carriages in its new Pendolino trains to first class? It must be part of Richard Branson's cunning plan to squeeze maximum fares out of passengers, even when that means reducing the numbers carried (*Eyes passim*).

Virgin belatedly ordered an additional standard-class carriage for each eight-carriage train (to compensate for the trains running slower than planned and therefore making fewer journeys) but these have yet to enter service. The early signs are that Beardie's plan has hit a snag: battle-hardened passengers aren't forking out the extra for first-class seats but are putting up with the overcrowding and cramped seats in standard.

Virgin has temporarily downgraded a first-class carriage to standard in some trains, but it's not beaten yet. It's running a £1.5m advertising campaign to persuade standard-class passengers to try first class, hoping many will switch permanently. The ads promote a special first-class book-ahead ticket costing the same as a standard-class open ticket, eg £91 London-Manchester.

If £91 for a one-way London-Manchester trip looks like a bargain for first-class travel, albeit with strings attached, it's worth remembering that in summer 1997, soon after Virgin took over, a first-class open single – valid on any train – cost £67.50. Now that same ticket costs £140: a 107 percent increase compared with inflation of around 16 percent. Virgin says first class brings many benefits – "more room to work", free newspapers and "a sumptuous full English breakfast". So that's all right, then.

PS: Always looking to develop new sources of income, Virgin has won huge bailouts from the "strategic" rail authority, which wanted to avoid a legal clash between Virgin and Network Rail over the delayed west-coast renewal. Now Virgin is considering suing train-builder Alstom for late delivery of the Pendolino trains. But Alstom is unlikely to roll over like the SRA did: Beardie himself delayed the new trains by tweaking aesthetic specifications during construction. What chance the SRA will settle this dispute with another dollop of our cash?

PASSENGERS in the Midlands who find themselves with no trains at all can thank Richard Bowker's leadership at the SRA. The industry's priority is to reduce its inflated costs (it now needs £5bn a year more than it collects in fares and freight charges – about five times what British Rail needed) but the SRA and its army of consultants are busy rearranging the deckchairs. And on the privatised railway even rearranging deckchairs is costly.

To give his beloved Virgin Trains more room on the west-coast mainline, Bowker decreed that Silverlink's London-Northampton-Birmingham services be scaled back and split in two. The northern section and some of Silverlink's trains will switch to Central Trains in September. At least staff transfer should be simple as National Express owns both franchises. Er, not quite. Central is now having to train hundreds of its staff for a type of train and a route that weren't in its portfolio before. The task is so big Central has suspended three local services for a year to release drivers and guards.

Bowker has also decided new trains will take over Northampton services next year. There's nothing wrong with the existing trains (built in 1988) but as the new ones are more agile they'll get in Virgin's way slightly less. Central staff freshly trained for the current rolling stock will disappear behind the scenes again to be trained for the new trains.

Bowker's decisions will clock up extra costs for training and replacement buses while Central loses revenue as people abandon the suspended local services. But Central managers won't lose sleep because the SRA covers any losses that arise. Central's subsidy is planned to be 32 percent higher, at £221m, this year than last.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
AT LEAST ALL THESE DELAYS GIVE US TIME TO READ
DELAYS
AND CATCH UP ON EVENTS IN THE NEWS
APPARENTLY, THE RAILWAYS ARE IN A TERRIBLE STATE...
Grizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GANGSTA RAP

AN ILLEGALLY-erected shop selling replica guns, body armour and drug paraphernalia including pipes suitable for smoking crack was "not particularly ideal" for the centre of Hackney, awash as it is with real guns and drugs, police chief inspector Mick Dod told the Hackney Gazette. "But obviously the owner thinks he has more of a market here."

Knacker would be keeping an eye on things when the former florist at 249b Mare St reopened, but otherwise there was little he could do. The shop is currently closed for refurbishment, but its stock is already on display, to the annoyance and alarm of many residents.

Hackney borough council was pretty powerless, too, a spokeswoman for the Labour authority told the *Gazette*: "Our enforcement team have visited the shop and it is an illegal extension of a site [249/249a Mare St] within a conservation area." But the council could do nothing until it established who owned the site, and that could take weeks because it was "waiting for records to arrive from the land registry".

The council seems to be unaware of the website www.landregisteronline.gov.uk, from which anyone can obtain land registry records in a few minutes for a fee of £2. *Eye* reader and Hackney resident Jim Paton did just that. The register reveals that numbers 239 to 249a Mare St are owned by none other than, er, "the mayor and burgesses of the London Borough of Hackney".

DOLE NOT COLE

SO FAREWELL, then, to the Labour party's overall majority on Doncaster council, swept away on 10 June by a surge of support for Independent candidates and the Lib-Dems which cost the party of Donnygate 18 seats.

Among the casualties was Labour councillor Tony "Antisocial" Corden, whose aggressive rant at a couple of community safety wardens (*Eye* 1106) led to, er, the wardens being suspended from work for reporting him (*Eye* 1107).

And farewell, too, for now, to the ambitions of Phil Cole, husband of gorgeous, pouting home office minister Caroline Flint. When *Eye* 1102 reported that he had ambitions to replace Doncaster's elected mayor, Martin Winter, Cole penned a smug denial which claimed he aspired only to "the more modest role of Labour candidate for the June elections". Sadly Cole came fourth in his ward, behind two Labour colleagues and an Independent, so we will have to wait for his ever-so-'umble contribution to local politics.

After the dreadful results for Labour, Mayor Winter, whose fat cat 50 percent pay increase (*Eye* 1099) and freebie Mercedes (*Eye* 1093) dominated doorstep conversations with canvassers, defiantly declared: "People have to understand that as elected mayor I have executive control of the council... I will continue in the direction I have set." Winter himself is up for re-election next year, so he had better get a move on.

● ONE Labour councillor who didn't wait to be booted out by an ungrateful electorate was Bryan North, former lord mayor of Leeds. He stepped down last year, just as council auditors began investigating alleged financial irregularities during his term. Their report is now with Inspector Knacker, and North has headed south, retiring to Spain. Now, we hear, the council is investigating claims that, following a twinning trip to China, he allowed a Hong Kong tailor to use the lord mayor's suite at Civic Hall to run a business supplying Leeds councillors with made-to-measure suits at knock-down prices.

Name change

DYER'S Court in Beechwood Avenue, Woodley, is to be known as The Chestnuts – after town councillors decided it was not a very appropriate name for an old people's home.

Reading Chronicle

SOUNDLY BIRCHED

LABOUR took a hammering in Hastings on 10 June, losing its overall majority, and is now outnumbered by the Tories and Lib Dems. The fate of leader Jeremy Birch will depend on frantic horse-trading before a full council meeting on Eye publication day, 23 June.

Interviewed by the BBC the morning after, Birch was clear about who was responsible for the loss of six Labour seats – Tony Blair. "It was down to a variety of national and international issues. The war in Iraq for one..." he said.

Too modest! Cllr Birch is playing down his own role in the election. Take his idea to impress audit commission inspectors who visited Hastings last November for the council's "comprehensive performance assessment" (CPA). Birch decided to hold a cabinet meeting in a school, to show how the council "gets involved" with the community. During an animated debate about a proposed play area, of all things, Cllr Birch became agitated and "got involved" in a furious row with residents. Two street wardens had to be called in to prevent fisticuffs while the CPA inspectors were ushered out.

Since then Cllr Birch has kept a low profile. So low, in fact, that he did not attend the recent D-Day tributes in the town. Birch's deputy, Jay Kramer, meanwhile, had her "own personal way of dealing with the event" – ie by not turning up either. In fact none of the council's Labour cabinet members attended.

Veterans called it "disgraceful" and "disgusting". But happily there was no party bias in their anger, for the leader of Hastings Conservatives, John Wilson, was also "away on business" on the day. Harry Parcell, an 82-year-old D-Day veteran from Enfield who came down for the event, said: "If they were our councillors I would turf them out." But Birch and Kramer were not up for reelection this year, so it was left to other Labour councillors to suffer the people's wrath instead.

VILE NEV

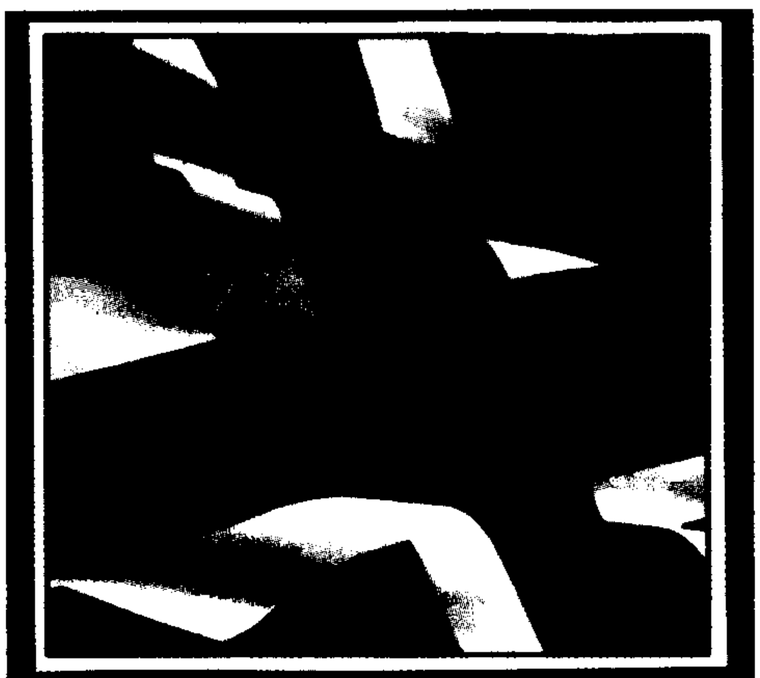
NEVILLE "Fuck the Irish" Sanders (*Eye* 1104) didn't let a trivial matter like being expelled from the Conservative party get in his way of standing for re-election to Peterborough city council, of which he was leader until his trenchant views were aired nationally last year.

Tory HQ had had enough of his outspoken attacks on every minority he could think of – the disabled ("lying cheating people that fiddle the disabled register because it delivers more social security money than the normal dole"), *Big Issue* sellers ("all drug dealers"), women councillors ("harlots") and the Irish ("lazy") – not to mention gypsies, Asians, blacks, people who look at him in a funny way and trade unionists.

While that may have been too much for Smith Square, it was clearly no more than sound commonsense for the villagers of Newborough, who voted the old bigot back in as an independent on 10 June with a majority of 200 over Martin Bell tribute act Simon Potter, a local radio newsreader, who stood against him on an anti-sleaze ticket.

Sanders, 72, had not attended a council meeting for a year prior to 10 June, due to "ill health" – although he was not too indisposed to stand for election. And he was well enough to be the first of the 57 councillors to turn up at the town hall to sign the forms to make him a councillor. Sanders' erstwhile Tory colleagues had eased his path back to the council chamber by finding themselves unable to find a candidate to put up against him. The Tories increased their overall majority from three to nine, with Labour reduced from 17 seats to seven.

Sanders' resurrection provoked outraged letters from the people of urban Pottyborough to the local newspaper. "Are the people of Newborough stupid?" asked one. They also say the Pope is not a Presbyterian.



Conservative literature for London MEPs
(flag is Iceland's)

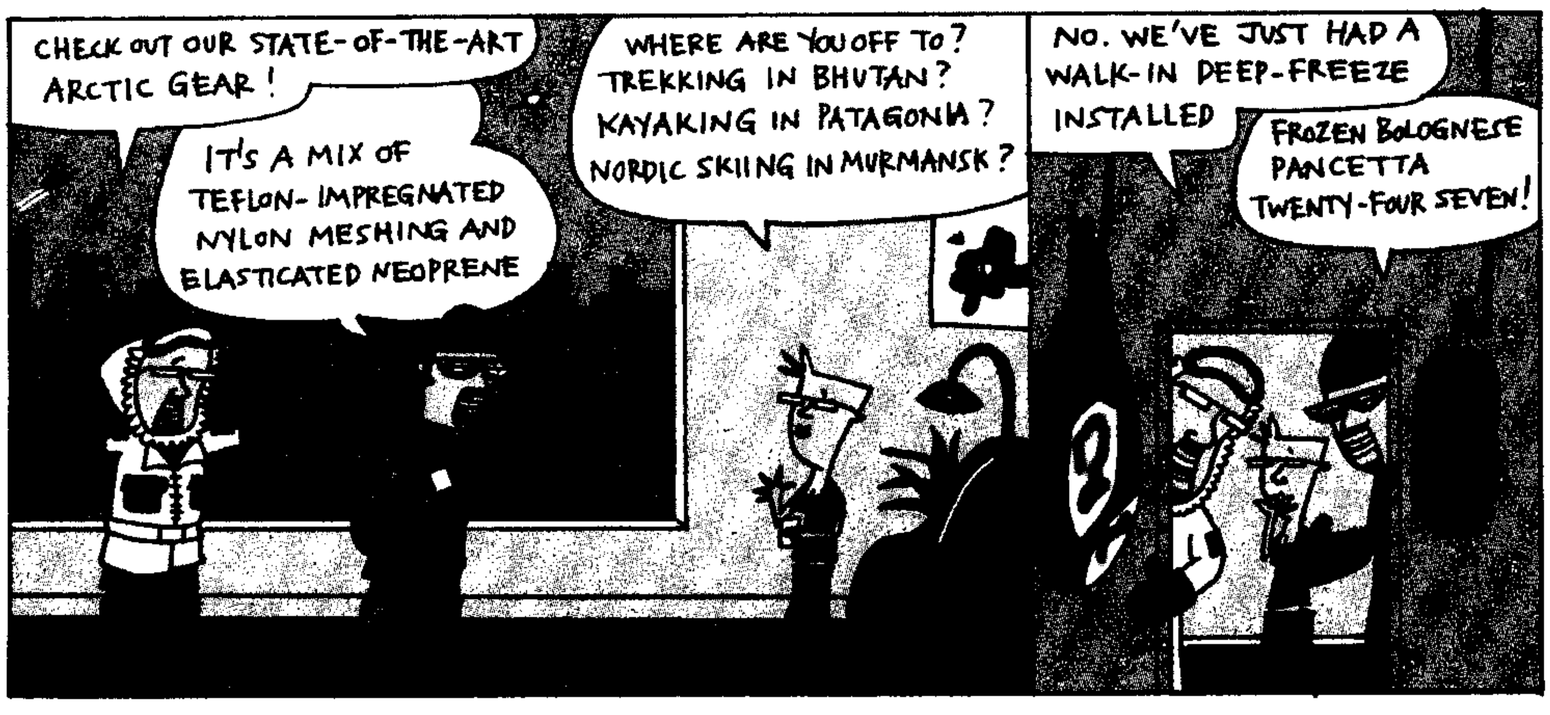
POLICE 5

DEPUTY assistant commissioner Stephen Roberts, Scotland Yard's senior officer in charge of professional standards, has written to senior officers to complain about "unduly lenient sentences" handed down to police officers convicted of driving while drunk.

He encloses guidance from the home office to the effect that officers convicted of this offence should expect to lose their jobs. He also attaches the record of the last 17 cases of such convictions, noting that four of the 17 continue to be employed by the Metropolitan police.

"We are in danger," he writes, "of reducing the 'risks' to officers who commit these offences, consequently condoning their behaviour... I seek your assistance in arresting this drift towards 'acceptability' of drink/driving within this service and have asked the Misconduct Office to bring to the attention of the deputy commissioner all cases where the expectations of both the home office and the Metropolitan police service do not appear to be met."

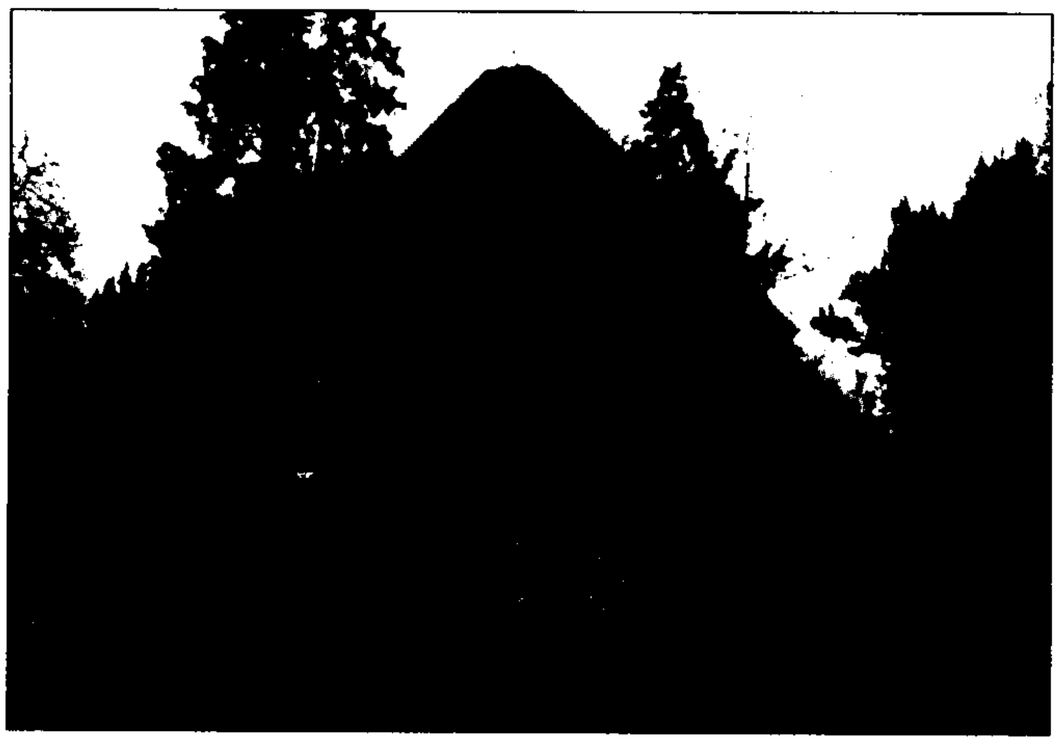
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


CHECK OUT OUR STATE-OF-THE-ART ARCTIC GEAR!
IT'S A MIX OF TEFLON-IMPREGNATED NYLON MESHING AND ELASTICATED NEOPRENE
WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO? TREKKING IN BHUTAN? KAYAKING IN PATAGONIA? NORDIC SKIING IN MURMANSK?
NO. WE'VE JUST HAD A WALK-IN DEEP-FREEZE INSTALLED
FROZEN BOLOGNESE PANCETTA TWENTY-FOUR SEVEN!

NOOKS and CORNERS

SOTTERLEY, near Beccles in Suffolk, has a fine medieval church in the grounds of Sotterley Hall. It also has an interesting little cemetery chapel which the responsible authorities wish to be rid of but which most villagers want to keep and restore.

In 1883 land was sold by the Barnes family of Sotterley Hall to enable the village to have a new cemetery to replace the parish churchyard and in the centre of this a chapel was built. The architect is not recorded, but it is an unusual



building. Constructed of red brick in a simple Gothic style, it is octagonal in plan with large porches on either side. Unfortunately it has been neglected for years as nobody will take responsibility for its upkeep: neither the parish council nor the Sotterley estate.

A few months ago a local – Doreen Fisher – came across workmen throwing out the pews and digging up the floor of the chapel and discovered that they were under orders to demolish it. A stay of execution was obtained from Waveney district council. It transpired that the parish council had decided to destroy the chapel to make the site "safe" and claimed that it had told everyone in a note in the parish magazine – which most villagers missed.

Miles Barnes at the big house also supports the demolition of the chapel, apparently because he fears its restoration would compete for funds needed to maintain the parish church. However, most locals signed Mrs Fisher's petition to save the chapel. Many have relatives buried in the cemetery and in some ways the chapel is a more important local building than the ancient church as it stands near the road, close to the village war memorial.

The parish council claims it will cost £14,350 to restore the chapel; the conservation officer for Waveney – who has proved peculiarly useless and unhelpful – thinks it needs £25,000. But no proper survey has been done and some locals think that as the building is essentially in good condition it probably needs no more than £1,000 worth of repairs. There is further uncertainty as nobody seems to know who owns the building and ought to take responsibility.

Shamed into calling off the demolition men, the parish council has given a hurriedly formed committee six months to take over responsibility and raise funds for repairs. I wish them luck. What is depressing is how those who ought to know better resort to demolition rather than thinking of ways of maintaining sound, attractive and potentially useful structures. But it's cheering that there are always some who are prepared to fight to save interesting historic buildings – even when they're not listed or designed by celebrities.

YOU READ it here first. Sir Stuart Lipton, chairman of Stanhope plc, has at last resigned as chairman of the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) before publication of the independent auditor's report on possible conflicts of interest in the advisory body, what with eight out of the 15 commissioners having connections with Lipton's company [as first revealed in Eye 1094].

But there are still questions to be answered: why on earth was an influential property developer ever considered as an appropriate chairman of such a body in the first place? And why did the incoming Blair government decide to replace the Royal Fine Art Commission with CABE rather than simply reform it (and replace My Lord St John of Stevas as chairman) as was needed? In the event, CABE has proved an even more compliant mutual admiration society for fashionable modern architects than even the old RFAC ever was.

FURTHER proof of the power of this column is that within days of publication of the story of the threat to the setting of J.M.W. Turner's own villa in Twickenham [*Eye* 1107], Mr Brasher the canoe man withdrew his fourth vexatious planning application to build a four-storey block nextdoor. Hooray. Perhaps he will now leave Professor Livermore in peace to establish Sandycombe Lodge as a public museum.

'Piloti'

I-SPY

[redacted] *Side, Turkey*

RESTORAN FATSO 食来香酒家 *Malacca, Malaysia*

CABBAGES & CONDOMS RESTAURANT ภาวิทย ซี แอนด์ ซี *Khorat, Thailand*

[redacted] *Agadir, Morocco*

Submitted by M.Cleary, Bob Bush, Casey Nolan & J.Paine. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IF THERE's one thing worse than a scrap among professional musicians, it's a scrap among amateurs; and a nasty one has been running for the past few weeks in Halifax, home of the long-established Halifax Choral Society (HCS).

Founded in 1817, the HCS claims to be the oldest organisation of its kind in the world and certainly has a distinguished record, peaking in the first half of the last century when it was conducted by the likes of Henry Wood and Malcolm Sargent. More recently its light has shone less brightly, but it soldiers on – or, as its website puts it, "goes from strength to strength" under "the inspired leadership of John Pryce-Jones", its musical director.

In fact the website doesn't represent the views of many of the singing members, nor of half the governing board. For there has been an epic row with Mr Pryce-Jones in which 13 choir officials have resigned, Pryce-Jones has threatened to resign (twice) and, though its bicentenary is in sight, the future of the HCS looks to be in the balance.

For years the HCS has hired-in for its concerts the services of something called the North of England Chamber Orchestra, which is in fact the orchestra of Leeds-based Northern Ballet Theatre by another name. The NECO, though, charges around £2,500 more per engagement than other local bands like the equally good (or possibly better) orchestra of Opera North.

So, reasonably enough, the society wants to switch to Opera North. But Pryce-Jones doesn't. And why not? Because in addition to his job with the society, he is also the music director of Northern Ballet Theatre and, er, artistic director of the North of England Chamber Orchestra. Regarding this cosy set-up, Pryce-Jones has made the point that having his finger in so many pies is to the benefit of the society, facilitating a deeper artistic rapport with the players it hires-in, etc, etc.

But this busy man is also founder-director of an organisation called NOEL – Northern Orchestral Enterprises Ltd – which was established to develop and promote the activities of the North of England Chamber Orchestra. And what's more, NOEL employs his wife Alison in various capacities. All things considered, you can understand why he might be so peeved at the prospect of NBT alias NECO alias NOEL losing its Halifax bookings. How could he be otherwise?

Unfortunately his peevishness has brought the society to its knees, riven with strife and ill-feeling. It all promises to be very unpleasant at the extraordinary general meeting called to address the issue later this month. One could almost feel sorry for the singers of Halifax but for their silliness in allowing Pryce-Jones's cosy (and profitable) set-up to continue for so long.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

They want to overthrow Conceptual Art and replace it with Figurative Painting.
BEING PRESENT
8 FIGURATIVE PAINTERS
JERWOOD SPACE
19 MAY → 4 JULY
At least that's the concept behind it...

Letters

ASA backwards

Sir,

How thoughtful of you to reprise all the criticisms you have made of the Advertising Standards Authority over the past four years (Ad Nauseam, 1108). And what an appropriately named feature.

Sorry to spoil the fun – but it was the "pisspoor ASA" that referred Sports Newspapers to the OFT. It's what we do, under the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations – our legal backstop.

And another thing. The Wotsits advertising that so upset the beleaguered Commons health committee was a TV commercial. If, as you reported, "regulation of all advertising in Britain will be handled by the ASA – Ofcom announcement, 17 May 2004", how is the non-broadcast ASA responsible for a 2003 TV campaign?

Yours faithfully,
CHRISTOPHER GRAHAM,

Director General, ASA.

Golfing in Afghanistan

Sir,

Your reference to the Kabul Golf Club (p4, issue 1108) revives memories of my game there in 1972 with an English colleague. We were there soliciting the renewal of the insurance for Ariana, the Afghan Airline (an account I once handled).

Prince Tarzi, the delightful minister for tourism, had explained to us that the US and British embassies had insisted that a golf course would rapidly pay for itself by attracting enterprising golfing tourists.

The course was constructed at great expense in the inhospitable foothills a few miles from Kabul and was thereafter used almost exclusively by the staff of the British and American embassies. The king was not amused.

We were the only players on the course that day. By each "green" (actually smooth sand dampened with diesel oil) lived a man in a hole in the ground, who emerged after our putting to smooth down the surface with a trowel. "Plus ça change" it seems.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN FARMER,

Director, PWS International Ltd.

Steamed up

Sir,

Mindful of the great store you set by factual accuracy, I read with interest the item on Thomas the Tank Engine (Eye 1108). I'm sure I am not the only one to notice that the bus in the original stories was called Bertie and not Ronald as stated. The character of the bus has clearly been renamed for humorous, alliterative reasons incorporating Ronald's specific role within the transport infrastructure.

Those of my vintage will also recall the story where Bertie and Thomas have a race in which Thomas ultimately triumphs. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to mock the Rev. Awdry's failure to foresee the ravages of Beeching, Railtrack, Richard Branson and leaves as he naively assumes that a train will be faster than a bus across a remote rural community.

Yours sincerely,
FRANCIS R. FOX,

Dereham, Norfolk.

Duty calls

Sir,

Like your correspondent Chris Burmajster (1108), I am a rural dweller but unlike him I have no objection to paying even more duty on fuel, provided the extra revenue is used for socially beneficial purposes – and my income is only £11,000 pa.

In my remote corner of North Yorkshire the local population is roughly half and half hill farmers and incomers. Both groups insist on driving large gas-guzzling 4x4s (and I'm not talking about the bog standard Land Rovers used on the farm) whereas I drive an 850cc car which returns at least twice the mpg of their monsters which rarely have more than one or two people aboard and whose 4x4 capability is needed no more than 5 or 6 times a year. Some incomers even have the gall to complain about the cost of driving 50 miles to work when they choose to live so far away from their job.

Sadly our economy is dependent on oil, a scarce commodity, and so we have no right to cheap road fuel to the detriment of future generations. The only realistic way of curbing usage, other than by rationing, is by price, even if it is a blunt instrument.

PETER ATKINSON,

Richmond, N. Yorks.

Lookalike

Marr

Nicholls

Sir,

Has anybody noticed the extraordinary resemblance between Andrew Marr, the BBC's political editor, and Joe Nicholls, the England fan wrongly labelled a thug and a "thicko" and deported from Portugal?

JESSICA GOOCH,

Harrow.

Put out more flags

Sir,

Following Alistair Darling's declaration of wholehearted support for safety cameras on our roads, I gather he has instigated a new initiative aimed at warning drivers and pedestrians of the presence of other vehicles which are being driven by intellectually impaired individuals.

Apparently, the cars are easily identified by the presence of a white flag with a red cross, which must be flown from one window. Those at a particular disadvantage must fly two flags.

Yours etc,
ENA B. STUBBS,

Via email.

Old folk tale

Sir,

I would like to put the record straight on your report "That's all, old folks" (Private Eye, 28 May).

The Legal Services Commission is committed to funding community care cases which include challenges to residential home closures. This is why we are now funding an increased number of 79 law firms and not-for-profit agencies specialising in cases of this nature. These cases attract the same rates of pay as any other and it is not true to say that there are "very few law firms willing to take on such unprofitable cases".

In spending taxpayers' money, the commission always needs to consider the best source of help so that we can properly fund as many deserving cases as possible. We always prefer that the nearest source of help is used, thus saving time and travel costs incurred by solicitors and ensuring that we can help more people.

In this case, we have not sought to stop solicitor Yvonne Hossack from dealing with cases outside the East Midlands. What we have said is that if Ms Hossack takes on such cases, she cannot expect us to pay for additional travel costs ***if there is a specialist solicitor nearer who is able to take on the case.***

Legal Aid minister David Lammy was, therefore, right when he stated that "the LSC accepts that there will be many occasions when Community Care cases may justify travelling time and costs... subject to the sufficient benefit test and to the need to approach the work in a sensible and realistic manner".

Yours faithfully,
CLARE DODGSON,

Chief Executive, Legal Services Commission.

Scenes You Seldom See

Absolutely quackers

Sir,

Whereas I'm the first to admit that drug companies, like all organisations, are far from perfect (Eye 1108, p3), I suggest that if you are really concerned about pharmaceutical skullduggery you should have a pop at "alternative" medicine, especially homeopathy. At least GlaxoSmithKline sells drugs that work. Meanwhile the NHS spends unknown amounts of money (I have asked them – they don't know) on homeopathic hospitals with no intention of actually evaluating evidence of effectiveness.

Regards,
LES ROSE,

W. Harnham, Salisbury.

Yo ho-ho

Sir,

With reference to Ms Ridenhauer's assertion that the street slang "Yo" and "Oi, bleedin' 'ell" are insoluble (Eye 1108), I fear she may be betraying her experience.

*Having first-hand knowledge of northern yoof culture, particularly with council estates, I can assure you that as a result of the diffusion of American "gangsta" rap music into our society, the lyrics and slang contained within such classics as NWA's "F*** tha police" or 50 Cent's "PIMP" when combined with the particular local vernacular, creates a truly harmonious and infinitely soluble hybrid.*

Big up and peace out,
me ole muckers,
THOMAS BAXTER LORD,

Manchester.

Radio ga-ga

Sir,

Since only one musician can be bothered to defend the revamped Radio Three against its uppity "Friends" [Music and Musicians 1107, letter 1108], can I as a born-again listener make a more vigorous effort to put the changes in context?

Far from "dumbing down" R3, I can't help thinking that Roger Wright has been given a golden opportunity to rid himself of the real dumbos. The reason? The relentless and profitable rise of Classic FM, the natural home of the people who previously clung to Three out of unexamined habit: those who reckon they "like classical" because they once saw the Three Tenors doing their rowdy showtunes from the operas; because they associate beatless, non-electric music with an idea of refinement; because they bought an expensive hifi but can't bring themselves to find out where modern music went after the Beatles; because their car listening is cover-mount CDs from the Mail on Sunday. These people may back Lunchtime O'Boulez into a corner at suburban parties and shriek at him with Chardonnay breath, but they don't scare me.

What business has a public service broadcaster in providing these people with more music to barbecue by? The classical CD industry is already in a poor state selling people what they already have by the shelfload (increasingly budget reissues of great and handily-dead performers), and opera companies seem determined to shoot themselves in the foot on aesthetic and financial grounds at every opportunity. Neither represents any idea of cultural continuity. Why not indeed do what Wright has done, and remake Three as a critical and contemporary "performance" channel, leaving the playlist and wallpaper duties to those with "classic lifestyle" advertisers to underwrite them?

Late Junction and Hear And Now are miracles of open-mindedness, the best things to happen on BBC radio in ages. And how smart to snap up Andy Kershaw as he fled Radio One (the real dumbshow in town)! All share a commitment to playing and discussing the work of living musicians and composers, who need the exposure and the royalties, and who inspire the culture of music-MAKING (not consuming and recycling) that keeps instrumental music alive and visible. Where do the "Friends" of Radio Three think their next generation of orchestral players will come from, even if they can't bear to acknowledge the existence of composition after the death of Britten, apart from the bizarre fawning over John Tavener who famously reviles the whole European post-Handel Germanic tradition that keeps playlist classical radio afloat?

"On Saturdays there is no classical content at all between 2pm and 6.30pm" snivels your man, as though it mattered. So what? It's mostly a competent jazz show, better than Radio 2 manages, and the really cultured are out then, doing their bourgeois duty: buying good food and wine, taking in exhibitions, paying attention to the world they live in. If the "Friends" must sit indoors all hours, Miss Havisham-like, could they not learn to find the off switch? Might they then manage to read a book, repot a few plants or even — daringly — practise a real musical instrument instead?

TONY CLARKE,

Via email.

Streets ahead

Sir,

*May I inform John Sutherland (Letters, 1108) that I **did** include his remarkably self-aware "I'll save you the trouble and send that sentence to Pseuds' Corner myself" when submitting his Streets LP review. The editorial decision to omit the sentence rests with Lord Gnome.*

So, the professor needn't wait for his fiver with bated breath. If it's any consolation, I haven't yet seen a penny for my submission.

Yours,
DOUGLAS McCARTHY,

London SE18.

Penpal plea

Sir,

Please may I through your letter column appeal for pen friends to write to prisoners on death row in the Caribbean?

Caribbean Write Line is a small organisation operating on a shoestring which tries to find correspondents for those who request support for friends both on death row and those whose death sentence has been commuted under the Privy Council Pratt and Morgan ruling. We took over from Caribbean LifeLines when that folded. We make no charge to either the prisoners or correspondent, though we do issue a biannual newsletter for which, should members wish to receive it, we ask a small subscription.

Many who happily holiday in the Caribbean are unaware that men and women are still being sentenced to death there, although it is five years since anyone was hanged. Many prisoners have lost touch with their families and have virtually no contact with the outside world other than through their pen friends. Conditions are harsh, legal representation sketchy and medical facilities frequently inadequate. Appeals can go on for years leaving the prisoners in a sort of limbo. The prisoner I write to has been in prison since 1988 – although there have been periods on remand, most of that time has been on death row.

Currently we have several men on death row waiting for pen friends. Anyone interested should write to me as co-ordinator at the address below.

Yours faithfully,
CLARE LE MESSURIER,

Co-ordinator, Caribbean Write Lines, 18 High Street, Tittleshall, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE32 2PJ.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He (Zidane) goes into this if not the best player in the world, the best player in the world."
GARY LINEKER, BBC1
(Anthony Murphy)

"Looks like he's got a bit of a knock there, judging by the language on his face."
CLIVE TYLDESLEY, ITV
(Rosemary Fong)

"The overhead kick could have gone anywhere, but it didn't."
MARK BRIGHT, BBC1
(John Rudge)

"Mentally, he's (John Terry) as strong as an ox."
MICHAEL OWEN
(Martin Naughton)

"Whether he (Wayne Rooney) will come as good as he has, only time will tell."
TREVOR BROOKING, BBC1
(Fred Wilkinson)

Sioux's who

Sir,

Might I suggest that, in future, you organise your magazine's photographic archive along less literal lines? Having requested a copy of your picture featuring a former Fleet Street editor enjoying an evening out with a charming Indian girl, imagine my disappointment when I received the enclosed picture instead.

Like the gentleman himself, I'm tempted to Sioux.

Yours,
ANON.

Fudging the issue

Sir,

No doubt the godly clerics who edit New Directions spend far less of their time wallowing in the gutter press than you and your colleagues do, but nonetheless I find it quite difficult to believe them so far detached from the things of this world that not one of them thought that the term "fudge-packer" might mean more than Father Robbie Low claims it to have done (Church News, Eye 1108). In fairness, though, you must concede that by comparison your own organ hardly stands proud and unblemished after a series of low abuses of ordained ministers with homosexual preferences (Alternative Rocky Horror Service Books passim, and the recent "Dr Spooner Revisited").

Yours reverently,
MARTIN PAYNE,

Maryland, USA.

Sir,

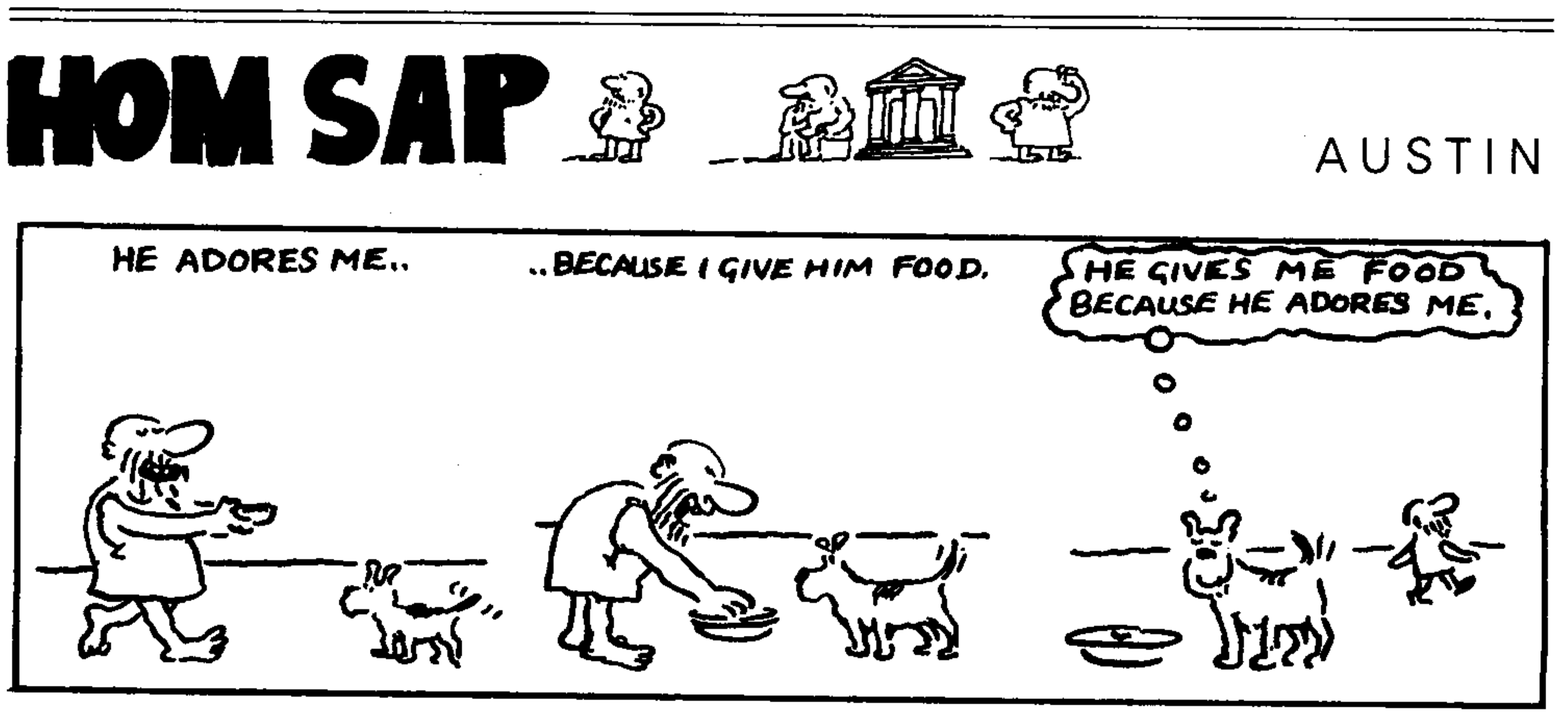
Your story about Forward in Faith and New Directions makes curious reading. One reader out of thousands (presumably a clergyperson – who else would have such a dirty mind?) complains that the Archbishop of Armagh is described as the "fudge-packer-in-chief". New Directions explains that the term is nothing to do with homosexuality, but refers to Dr Eames' famous and well-honed skills in fudging agreements on controversial matters. (The Church is still suffering from his fudge on the ordination of women.) You seem surprised that New Directions won't print a clarification.

If, out of your trillions of readers, one dirty-minded old bugger misunderstood what you had written, would you "print a clarification"? Would you sod! (To coin a phrase.)

Oh, and by the way, Forward in Faith does not have an obsession with homosexuality. Its obsession is with women priests and bishops, and that's why it's got so many members.

Yours,
JOCK TEASDALE,

London N17.



Letter from **New Delhi**

from Our Own Correspondent

AFTER the euphoria, the disappointment. Italian-born Sonia Gandhi may have turned down the premiership in favour of Manmohan Singh after elections last month; but there are few signs that such an apparently lofty and selfless decision will encourage her Congress Party-led and Communist-supported coalition to deliver improved governance and probity in India.

From her elegant colonial bungalow in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi, the 57-year old widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and heir to the Gandhi-Nehru political dynasty remains our *de facto* leader. Like a modern-day Mogul grandee, the unsmiling Sonia-ji – or "Madame", as she is called by the reverential and fearful – oversees all major political, bureaucratic and diplomatic appointments, exercising authority without responsibility.

Her main criterion for selecting those who seek high office appears to be unquestioned allegiance and craven obsequiousness to the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty that has dominated politics here since independence in 1947. Loyalty to Sonia's son Rahul, the newly-elected 34-year-old MP from the family pocket borough of Amethi in the north and prince-in-waiting, is an added requirement. So omnipotent and so feared is Madame in her Congress party that no member dares question her judgement, however flawed, even in private. The mildest criticism, relayed to her instantly, leads to swift political ostracism.

The self-effacing economist prime minister Singh, elevated overnight to the top job in the world's largest democracy, remains a non-person nearly a month after assuming office. Although of impeccable honesty in an otherwise corrupt polity, his pliancy and non-threatening personality were the real reasons for his surprise elevation. Our first Sikh prime minister, Singh features almost incidentally in public and the media, an accommodating shadow always ready to defer to Gandhi's wishes. In reality he has no choice. Her Caesar-like shunning of the crown left her fêted at home and abroad as a self-abnegating statesperson – although had Madame taken the job, she would have been shredded for her foreign origins by our wounded Hindu nationalists, now in opposition.

Singh's prospects for establishing his own credentials in government are further undermined by the appointment of several ministers in the 67-member cabinet embroiled in cases of corruption and attempted murder. One such appointment is the colourful railways minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, charged with corruption in government procurement when he was chief minister of the impoverished eastern Bihar state. Yadav's Socialist party is an integral part of the Congress-led alliance. Mohammed Taslimuddin, a junior agricultural minister in Yadav's party, stands charged with attempting to murder a rival, looting weapons from a police station and of intimidation. Two other ministerial colleagues from the party face graft charges.

The Congress says the ministers are innocent until proven guilty. Officials accuse Hindu nationalists who disrupted the recent short parliamentary session over the tainted cabinet members of "double standards" on public probity when they were in power. Outgoing deputy prime minister Lal Krishna Advani and two former cabinet colleagues were charged with inciting communal passions following the 1992 demolition of a mosque on a site disputed by Hindus, but remained in government. Hindu nationalists seem to think that demolishing a mosque, which led to sectarian rioting in which nearly 2,000 people died, was merely a "political" crime and hence tolerable.

Ironically the newly-elected 542-seat parliament has 100 MPs facing a variety of charges ranging from "minor" misdemeanours like disturbing the peace and rioting to offences like murder, rape and armed robbery. Of these around a third are involved in heinous crimes like murder and attempted murder, while 11 are known in their areas of influence as "dons", exercising a kind of medieval power of life and death over their constituents. Isn't democracy grand?

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "When I answered the phone, the caller said he was a police officer," the manager of the Taco Bell restaurant in Fountains Hill, Arizona told a press conference. "He asked me if there was a young female customer with a red jacket and long blonde hair sitting alone. I said there was, and he told me that she was suspected of theft, and that he wanted me to give her a body search. He told me it was my legal obligation, so I ordered her into a back room. Then he told me to order her to disrobe, and to give her a thorough all-over body search, so I did. It was only when he told me to make her stand on one leg and then do jumping jacks that I became suspicious, and asked him how I could be sure he was really a police officer. To prove that he

was, he started to pledge allegiance to the flag, but forgot the words, and hung up. It was then that I began to realise that all was not as it seemed."

The report was the latest in a series of hoax strip-search calls that have been plaguing fast-food restaurants throughout America. "It's mind-boggling that he gets away with it," said Sheriff Joseph Arpaio of Maricopa County. "Why would any responsible person do something like this just because some guy calls them on the telephone and tells them he's a cop? Yet we've documented more than seventy of these hoax calls during the past two years, and in almost every case, the manager has agreed to perform the strip search. And even more incredibly, the female customers have almost always gone along with the scam."

Former FBI agent Dan Jablonski, who has been investigating the incidents, added "this guy is clearly a sexual pervert who initially just wanted a cheap thrill from this weird form of phone sex. But as he's gone on, it's become more about power, and his orders have become ever more bizarre. We think he walks past a restaurant, sees a girl he likes the look of, then phones from across the street while looking through the window. Of course, he never gets to see what goes on in the back room, but just exercising such power seems to float his boat." *(Arizona Republic, 27/3/04. Spotter: Nick Burgoyne)*

– ● –

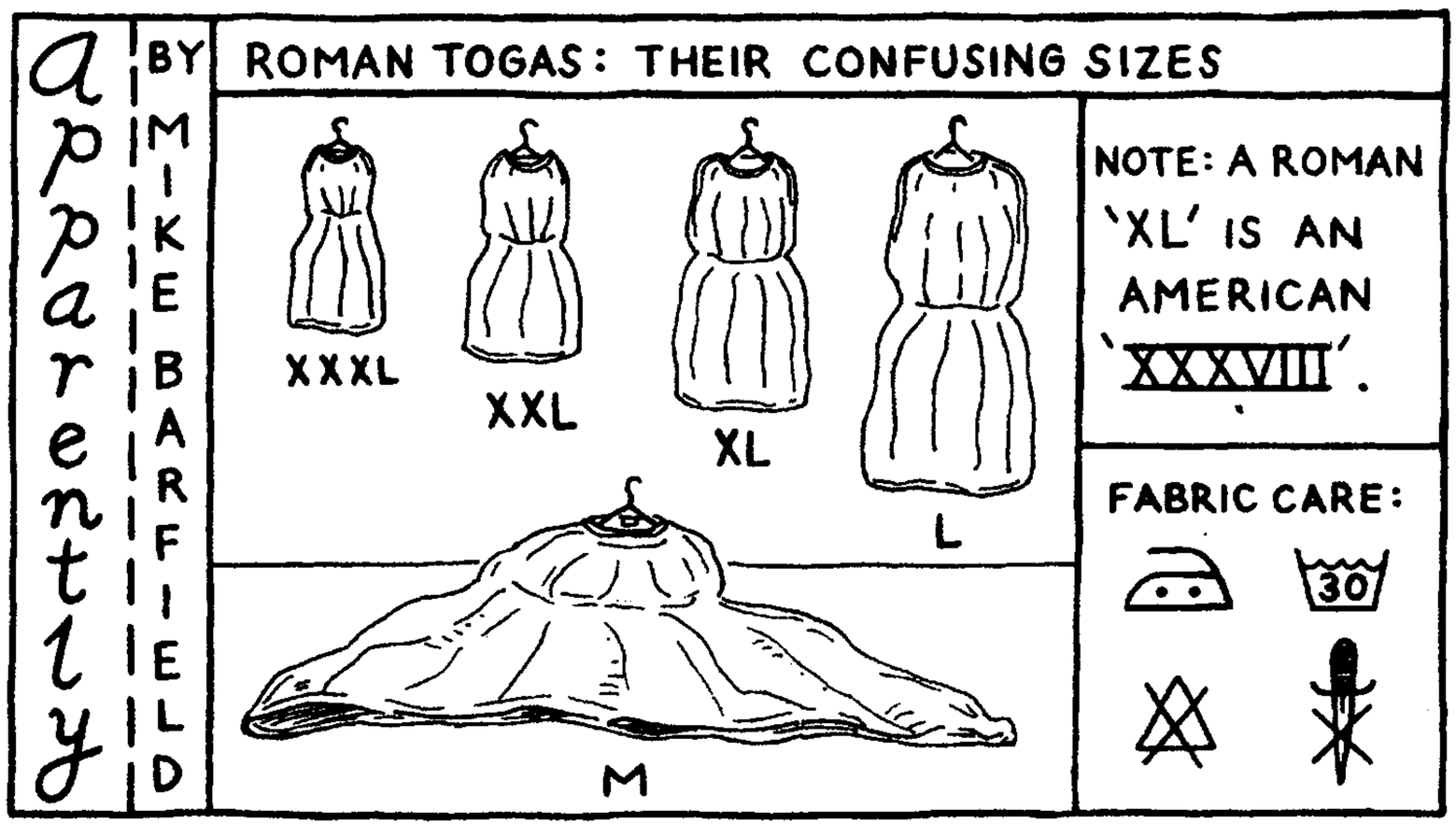
● *"When I applied for the job as taster, nobody warned me about the dangers," Bernd Naveke told reporters outside the Brahma Brewery near Rio de Janeiro. "Every day, I was expected to drink eight litres of beer to monitor the quality, and I left work blind drunk every evening. Twenty years on, I am now a registered alcoholic, and unable to hold down a job, so I am seeking compensation and a pension for life."*

Shortly afterwards, an employment tribunal gave its decision on Naveke's compensation claim. "All employers have a duty to protect their workers from ingesting harmful substances, and a brewery is no different from any other business. Mr Naveke's alcoholism has clearly been caused by his twenty years of dedicated work as a Master Brewer and Chief Taster. He tells us that beer tasters have to swallow their drinks, and cannot spit like wine tasters, and we have no reason to disbelieve him. The tribunal therefore rules that he is entitled to $2 million in compensation from the brewery, a monthly pension for life of $2,6000, equivalent to his old salary, and an unlimited supply of Brahma beer." (O Globo, 30/3/04. Spotter: Mal Function)

– ● –

● "Never mind the rumours, that mouse was not murdered," Alan Birch of the London and Southern Counties Mouse and Rat Club told the Executive Committee of the National Mouse Club in Shareshill, Wolverhampton. "It's true there was a drunken brawl, during which Bob Chappell got punched, and that shortly afterwards his chocolate tan mouse was found dead in its box, but you know what people are like. They put two and two together and make five. There were no signs of a struggle in the box, and as far as we're concerned, that mouse died of natural causes. Probably a heart attack. Case closed."

Mr Chappell remained tight-lipped about the death of his prize-winning mouse, but onlookers told reporters of a string of altercations between him and another mouse-fancier. "This is a cover-up," said one anonymous member. "That mouse died before its time. But we have a vow of omerta in this club. I cannot say more." *(Express and Star [Walsall] 25/3/04 and Birmingham Post 5/4/04. Spotter: Ms Pauline Beever)*



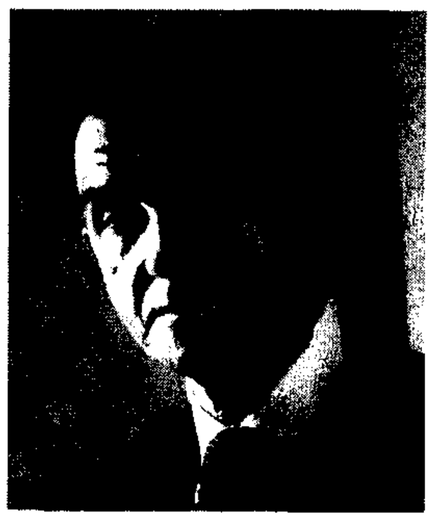
ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

"The Paper That Supports Our Vicar"

Stand Up, Stand Up For Tony!!!

A Message To All Parishioners From Peter Mandelson



YES, it's a totally new look for your parish newsletter this week. And no apologies for that!

In the light of some very cruel and unnecessary things that have been said about the Vicar recently, Tony has called me in to spell out a few home truths!

Some of you don't seem to have grasped just how serious the situation here at St Albion's has become.

I've heard people who ought to know better saying that the Vicar has lost his grip. That he is tired and worn out. Even that he has become mentally unbalanced.

What if he has? The point is that Tony is our Vicar, and far and away the best Vicar we've ever had, and ever could have.

That is why, all those years ago, I was the one who first saw his potential and put him where he is today.

Just think of all the good things which Tony has achieved in the past seven years.

I am sure we all have our own list of what he has done for the parish in that time.

Some might, for instance, point to our wonderful parish celebrations for the Millennium, centred round that unforgettable Tent (still, incidentally, for sale – see parish website for details).

Others might recall the success of our mission to Northern Ireland, in which I was privileged to play the central role (forgive me for blowing my own trumpet, but that has to be one of our finest achievements!).

But all that aside, let's look at the man himself.

Let me just give one instance of why Tony stands head and shoulders above us all.

As you know, some years back, when I was your churchwarden, I got into a bit of a tangle over my mortgage.

Thanks to the vindictive attitude of the previous editor of this newsleter, Mr Campbell, it was thought wise that I should take a back seat for a while in the running of the parish – which I was very happy to do since, although I had done nothing wrong, my sole wish was not to embarrass the Vicar.

Then it happened again. There was a silly misunderstanding over some help I gave to one of our most generous local benefactors, Mr Hinduja.

Again, the embittered and twisted Mr Campbell saw this as an opportunity to make me a scapegoat. And, once again, in deference to the interests of Tony, I was prepared to keep a low profile!

It was entirely predictable that, sooner or later, Mr Campbell would overreach himself and start behaving as if he was the most important person in the parish.

And if the Vicar has now become unpopular, who is there to blame other than the power-crazed psychopath who is now reduced to travelling round tatty little provincial theatres, telling everyone what a great man he is!

The fact that nobody goes to see him making such a sorry exhibition of himself in this fashion simply demonstrates how wrong he is!

Now we can draw a line under Mr Campbell, who has left the vicarage in such a shambles.

Fortunately, the Vicar has got one person on whose unfailing support he can always count, which is why he has called me back in his hour of need.

Try to imagine just what it would be like if Tony was to heed all those deranged parishioners (even including several ex-members of the PCC) who are calling for him to step down.

For a start, I know that I myself would be out of a job, and many others would too.

It is hard to conceive just what chaos would ensue for the parish.

Walls covered with graffiti. Teenagers drunkenly roaming the streets. Parishioners terrified to go out at night, for fear of being mugged.

So let me just say a final word to those of you who may not have understood the gravity of what I am saying.

I know where you live!

Thank you for your attention.
Peter Mandelson
Camp Commandant

A (brief!) note from Tony

As you know, I have had to be abroad rather a lot recently, attending various important meetings and conferences. And that's why I've had to ask Mr Mandelson to step in, to keep the show on the road back here in the parish!

I only want to make one point to you all this week, in answer to what our former organist Mr Cook and others have been saying. That is that I should apologise to the whole parish for getting it wrong in supporting the Rev. Dubya's crusade against the Evil One.

Of course I believe that we all have a duty to say that we are sorry when we have genuinely done something wrong. And I can assure you all that if, for instance, I had betrayed my wife and been caught misbehaving with my secretary in the organ loft, I might well feel constrained to make a grovelling confession!

But as far as the Rev. Dubya's great battle against Satan is concerned, I think you all know in your hearts that history will eventually prove that we were right!

Sorry, Robin, but I'm not going to say "sorry". Shall we leave it there and move on?

Yours in haste (or wherever I am at the moment!),

Tony

A Declaration Of Support From Our Treasurer Mr Brown

Dear Sir,

I would like at this time to put on record my full support for the Vicar. Over the last seven years, he has done a magnificent job, which in years to come he can look back on with great pride. I am sure we can all wish him well in his new

Yours sincerely,
Gordon Brown,
C/o Bishops Move.

The editor reserves the right to cut all letters for reason of space

The vicar returning from his European mission, waving a piece of paper. By local artist Mr de la Nougerede

BLAIR'S SHOCK NEW PLEDGE

by Our Employment Staff **Gerry Atrick**

IN A leaked document, the Prime Minister outlined his plan to force "certain people in key positions" to remain in work until at least the age of seventy.

Says the document, "The country can ill afford to lose the services of brilliant, fit, active septuagenarians who still have a great deal to offer. Some jobs take a great deal of time to complete and it would be folly to ask the holders of such jobs to step down and make way for elderly, infirm Scotsmen with little grasp of the basics."

The plan goes on to outline a possible scenario for when such key workers reach the age of seventy. "They will then be employed to enact legislation allowing them to continue working until the age of eighty or possibly ninety or whenever people have forgotten about Iraq."

GLENDA SLAGG

THE GAL FLYING THE ST GEORGE CROSS ON HER KNICKERS!!?!

■ **THE WILLIAMS sisters!??!? Arenchasick of them!?! Williamzzzz more like!? Venuzzz and Zzzerena!! We're in for a double dose of Yawn Tennis *(Geddit!?)* as these base-line ball-bashers make George Foreman look like Naomi Campbell?!!?! New Bores please, Mr Umpire!??!! Geddit?!!**

■ HATS OFF to Venus and Serena – these Amazonian goddesses from across the pond who bring a touch of glamour to the stuffy stuck-up strawberries-and-cream brigade at Wimbledon!?! Game set and match to the smash-ing *(geddit!)* sisters from the Home of the Hamburger!?!! New Belles please, Mr Umpire?!! Geddit?!!

■ **WAYNE ROONEY!?! Every mum in the land would like to have a spud-faced nipper like Wayne a-bootin' and a-shootin' in the street outside!!?! We'd all be proud to tuck him up in bed with a cup of Ovaltine and a teddy bear in his little arms!?! Night, night, little Wayney, God bless and sweet dreams!?! All together – aaargh!?!! *(You're fired Ed).***

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Top Seeds:

● **The Barclay Brothers** – OK, so one of them is ill. The other one will more than make up for it! Come and take me over Big Boys, you don't have to Telegraph your intentions!?!

● **Richard Wallace** – He's the new editor of the Daily Mirror!!?! "Mirror mirror on the wall, can I have a job please?" Geddit?!!

● **Raymond Snoddy** – Crazy name, crazy sacked media correspondent of the Times!!!?!?

Byeeee!!!

'Leave Melvyn Barg Alone'

by TV's Anthony Blair

IT'S open season on poor Melvyn Barg.

He is accused by critics of trying to do too much, of spreading himself too thinly, even of having a funny accent and a silly haircut.

Such abuse goes well beyond the bounds of fair criticism. It smacks of typical, narrow-minded British envy of success.

For Melvyn Bragg is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant and charismatic communicators of our age. Look at his record.

Bragg has written 75% more novels than anyone else. He has made 84% more arts programmes than anyone else. He has appeared on television 8,957,342 times.

No wonder I made him a Lord and asked his wife to write a book with Cherie.

© *The Indescribably Partisan*

AN EYE EXCLUSIVE

WE NAIL THOSE EUROSCEPTIC MYTHS ABOUT THE NEW CONSTITUTION

1 Under the new constitution, all red buses will be painted white and forced to drive on the right-hand side of the road. Untrue. The *Eye* says red buses will continue to be red and will come in threes, as per normal.

2 Under the new constitution, Britain's fishermen will have to re-train as supermarket check-out operatives in the enlarged European community. Untrue. The *Eye* says Britain's fishermen will merely be made redundant like anyone else.

3 Under the new constitution, the national anthem will be replaced by Edith Piaf's *"Je Ne Regrette Rien"*. Untrue. The *Eye* says the national anthem will remain *"Football's Coming Home"* as before. The new European anthem will be one verse each of *"The Marsellaise"* and *"Deutschland Uber Alles"*.

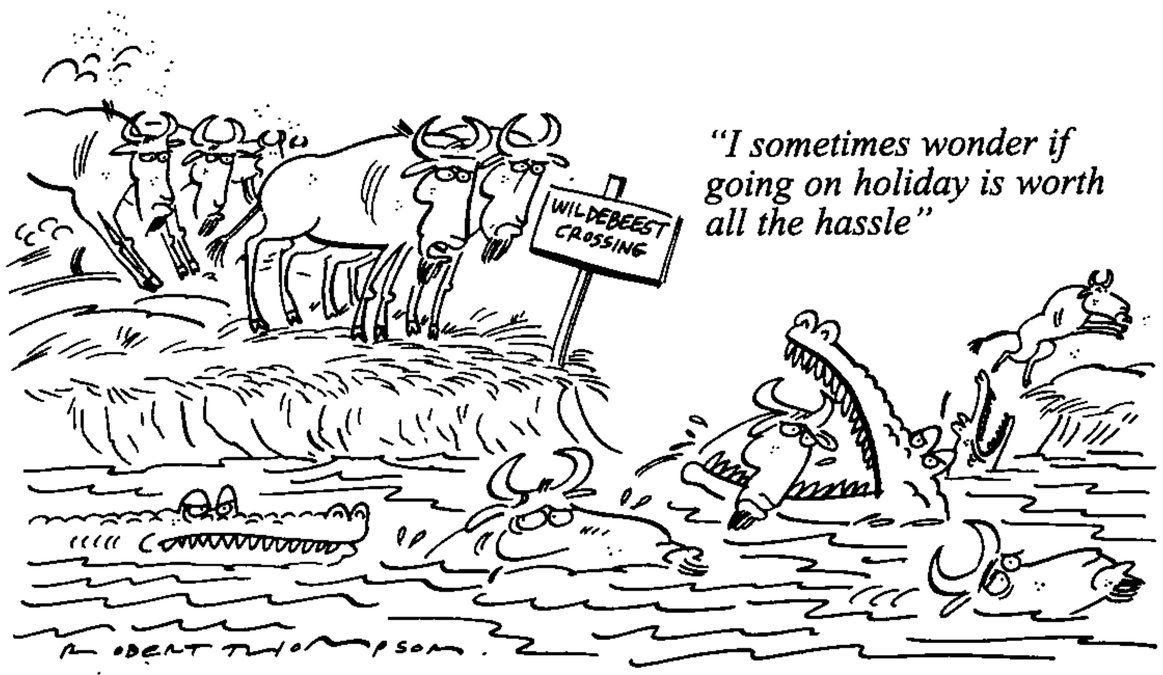
4 Under the new constitution, the Royal Family will be abolished and replaced by an EU President elected on a Big Brother voting system. Most likely candidates include Johnny Hallyday, Michael Schumacher and porn star La Mussolina. Untrue. The *Eye* says Britain's Royal Family will continue to be our leading tourist attraction and source of traditional humour.

5 Under the new constitution, English football players will be forced to play for Spanish clubs while the manager will be a Swede. All London football clubs will be owned and run by foreigners and full of continental players. True. The *Eye* says "Er..."

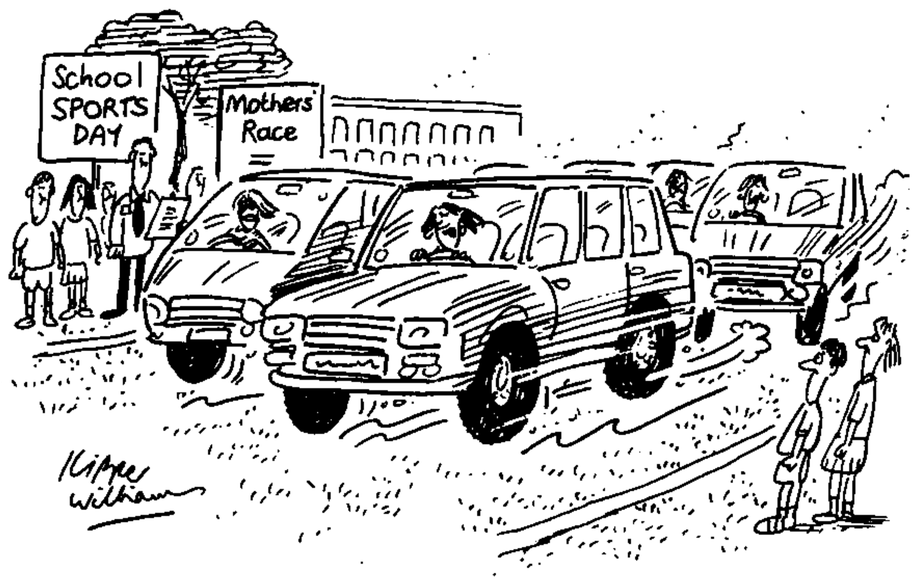
NONE TO WATCH AT WIMBLEDON

This year's cut-out-and-keep guide to the tennis stars you won't be watching because you're watching the football.

❶ Tim Henman. Is this the last year that we can write pieces saying "Can Tim pull it off this year?" *(cont. p. 94.)*



"I sometimes wonder if going on holiday is worth all the hassle"



My eBay

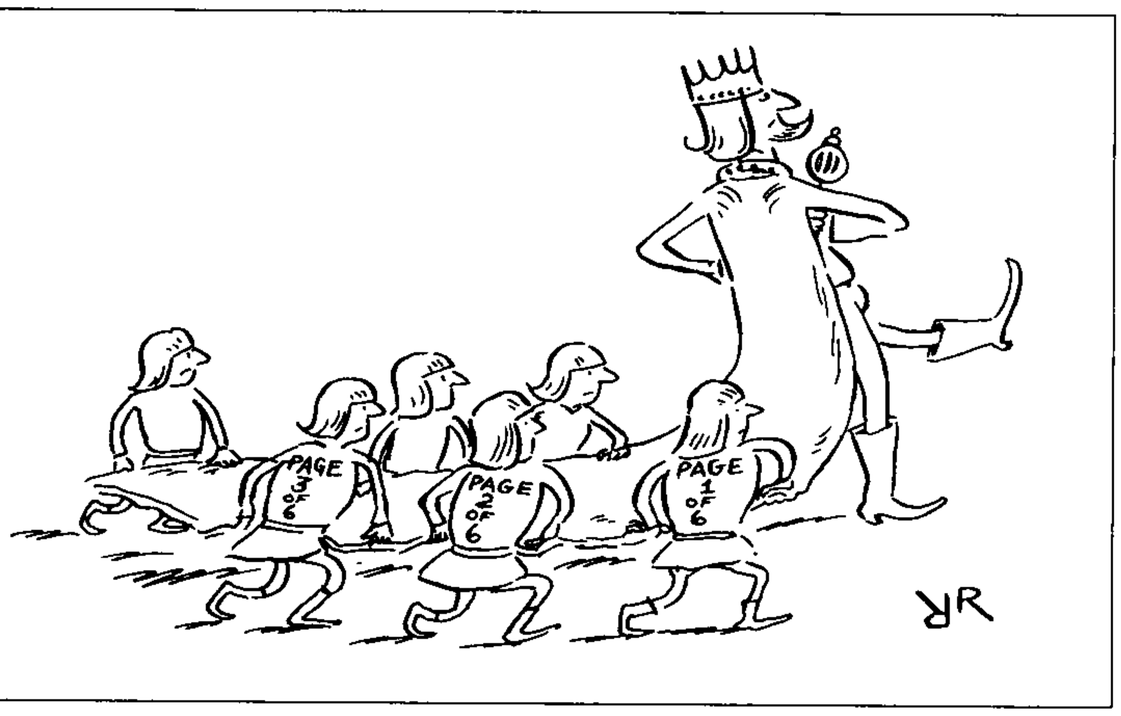
cherie boo (5)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-5 of 5 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	**Brazilian Mother-Goddess Re-Birthing Crystals *genuine***		
	£2,500	£1.50	1
☐	**Shoe Trees (pack 300 pairs, nearly new)**		
	£199.99	£49.99	1
☐	**CD: 'The Spinners – Greatest Hits'**		
	£2.99	£1.00	1
☐	**'Con-Tea-Kl' Tea Co. Slimming Tea – pkt. 48 bags**		
	£99.99	£1.00	1
☐	**'A to Z of Bristol' – good condition**		
	£2.99	£1.00	1

Items I'm Selling (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	**Handcrafted Scottish Wood, Child's Christening Mug (unwanted gift)**		
	£0.99p	Free!	0
☐	**Men's Fitness Exercise Bike (used once)**		
	£30.00	Buyer to collect	0
☐	**12-volume set 'History of Socialism', impressive binding, still in box**		
	£2.99	£1.00	0
☐	**'Be Your Own PR Manager' 'Smile Your Way to Success!' 2 paperbacks, as new**		
	£1.99	£1.00	0



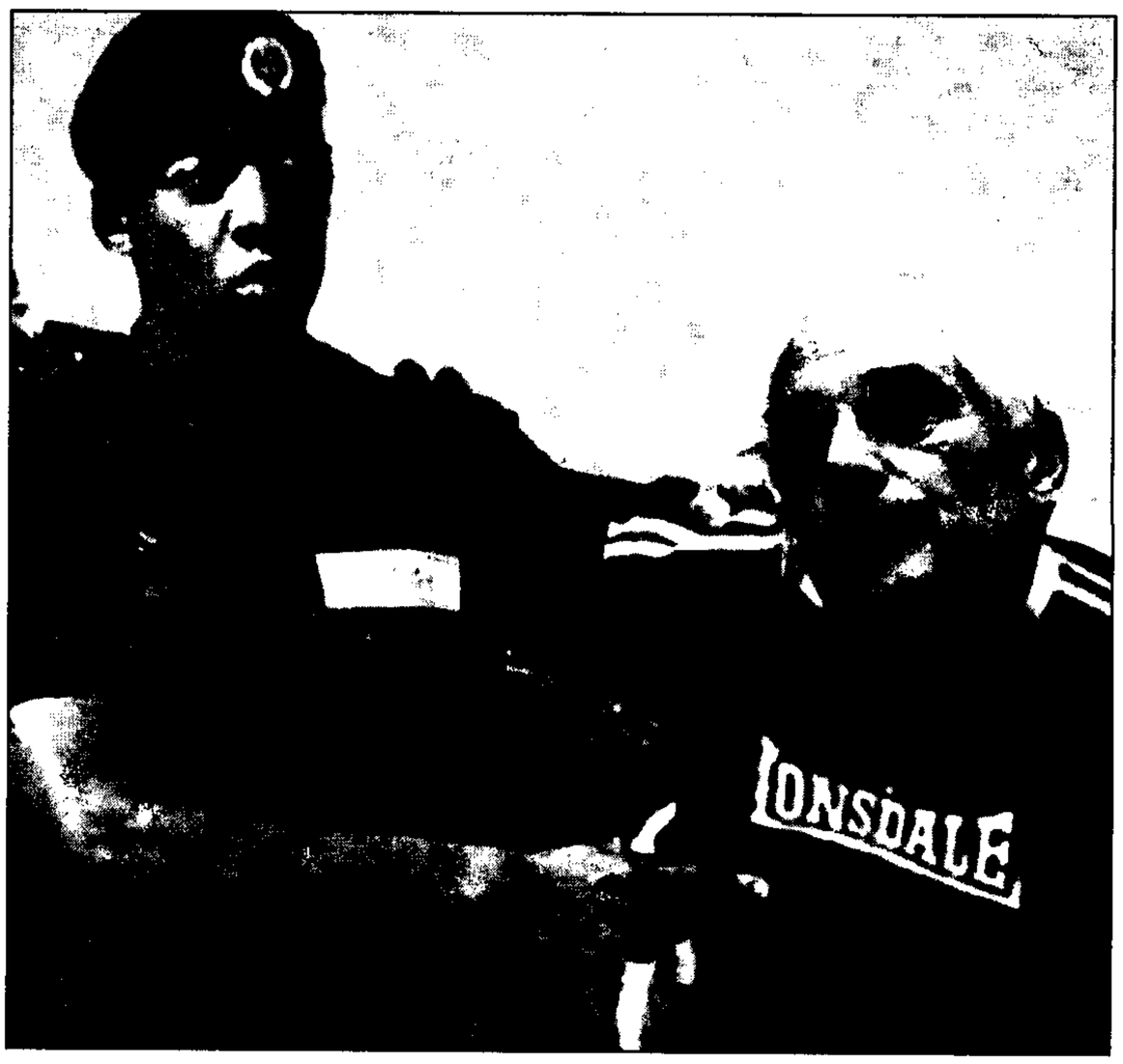
60 years ago many servicemen gave their lives to liberate Europe for tyranny.

Doncaster Conservative Literature

EURO 2004

DISGRACE

● Britain's Day Of Shame



by Our Man In Brussels E.U.R. O'BOOZE

BRITAIN must hold its head in shame today as yet again a handful of mindless morons have dragged our nation's good name into the gutter.

Shocked continentals watched in disbelief as a small gang of British hooligans, headed by their pea-brained leader 'Kilroy', stormed into the hallowed precincts of the European Parliament, shouting "We're going to wreck it."

Outrage

And make no mistake. These self-styled wreckers were not just lager-swilling yobs from sink estates in Britain's inner cities.

No – these flag-waving vandals all come from respectable middle class backgrounds, and in some cases have even had the benefit of a posh education at schools such as the prestigious, £24,000-a-term St Cakes.

Said one German onlooker, Heinrich Mandelschwein from Stuttgart, "zere ve vere, trying to pass a few directives on ze marketing of fish by-products, ven suddenly in rushes zis crazed mob, viz their placards saying 'UKIP for Ever', and laffing at us."

STOP PRESS

Order restored in Brussels

LAST NIGHT 12 Britons, describing themselves as 'UKIP MEPs', were reported to be queuing up 'in an orderly fashion' to collect their lavish £172-a-day expenses. Said their leader Kilroy, "The lads got a bit carried away on the big night, but it was just a case of harmless high spirits."

Later the 12 "hooligans" were seen in one of Brussels's legendary 5-star restaurants, "Chez Woy", tucking into several large plates of gravy, a famous local delicacy.

PRESIDENT ADMITS 'I DID IT BECAUSE I COULD'

GEORGE BUSH today revealed that he had 'inappropriate military relations' with Saddam Hussein for the very worst reasons, "just because I could".

"I didn't need the 9/11 Commission to tell me there was no proven link between Al Qaeda and Iraq", the President told reporters. "I knew all along what I was doing was wrong, but I just had these uncontrollable urges that only kicking Saddam's butt could quench, even though I knew it would leave a terrible stain on my presidency."

Lives Of The Saints

No. 94

St William of Clintstone by Himself

BORN IN humble circumstances in the slums of New Jefferson in Santa Monica, William Clintstone showed no early signs that one day he would become the greatest Saint America had ever seen.

As a young man, he studied the sexophone *(Surely 'saxophone'? Ed.)* and travelled to Oxford in pursuit of young women *(Surely 'marijuana'? Ed.)*.

But his easy charm and fluency drew him to a higher calling and he entered public service as Governor of Chainsaw, New Masscare and then eventually as President of the United States of America.

And it was here that St William was sorely tempted by beguiling young women who sought to lead him astray – with great success.

But then St William was betrayed by the Jezebel Lewinsky and he was forced to lie to protect his honesty and integrity.

And his enemies wickedly exposed him (faster indeed than he could expose himself to even more young women), saying that St Bill was a fornicator, a lecher and a perjuror to boot.

But St William repented and wrote in his world-famous "Confessions" that he had decided to forgive all those who had wickedly told the truth against him.

Bill wrote, "I took as my inspiration St Nelson of Mandela. He forgave the evil men who locked him up for twenty-seven years, so surely I had to forgive those even more evil men who had persecuted me – although there is a slight difference, in that St Nelson hadn't done anything wrong and I am a terrific phoney and a liar."

© St William of Clintstone, 10% of all proceeds to go to the Kabollox Foundation, Madollar House, Bond Street.

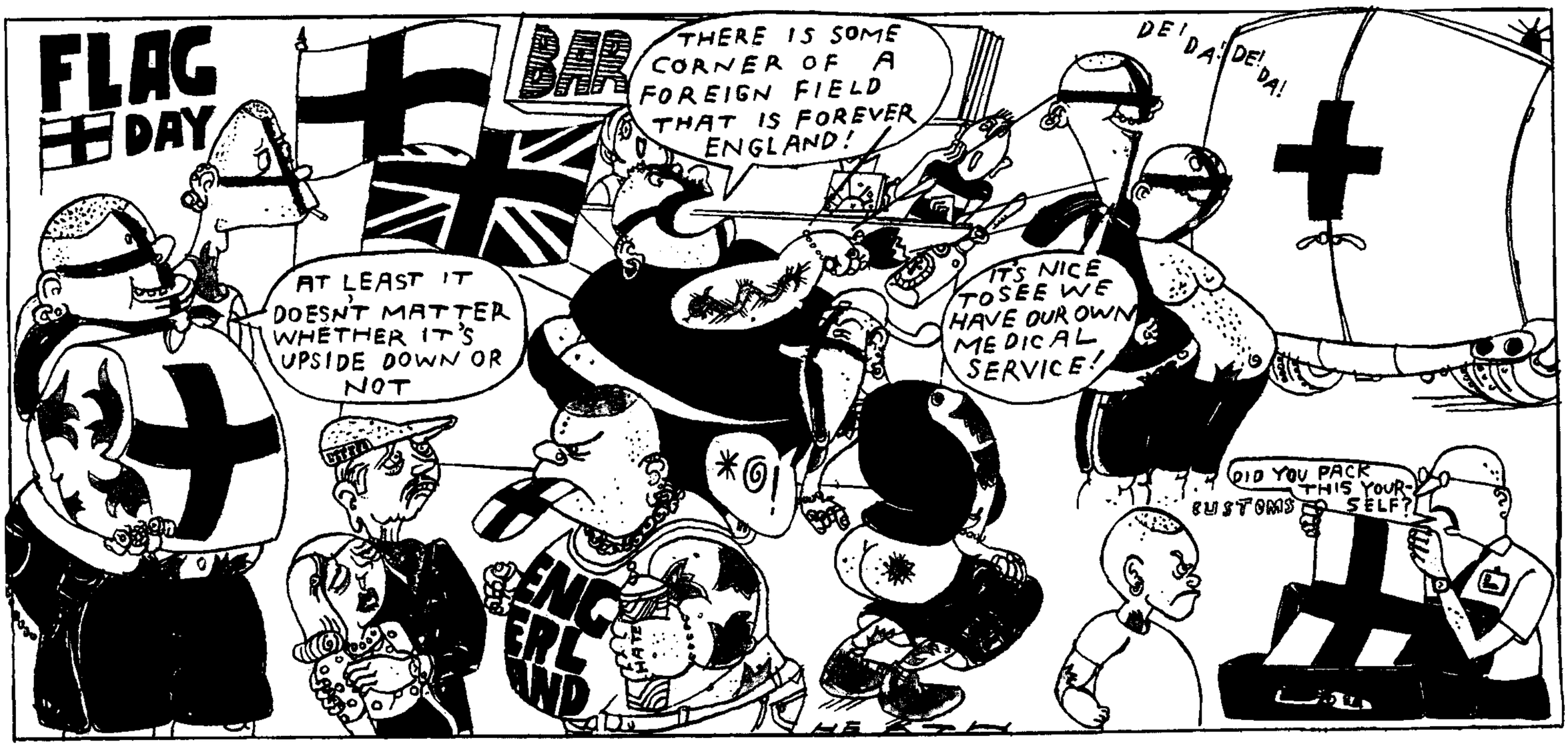
Free prescription collection & delivery service

Diazepam 5mg Tabs 10

Take ONE with water when required only WHEN the door is kicked in; max three daily

Warning. Causes drowsiness which may continue the next day

Prescription


FLAG DAY
AT LEAST IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER IT'S UPSIDE DOWN OR NOT
BAR
THERE IS SOME CORNER OF A FOREIGN FIELD THAT IS FOREVER ENGLAND!
*@!
DE! DA! DE! DA!
IT'S NICE TO SEE WE HAVE OUR OWN MEDICAL SERVICE!
DID YOU PACK THIS YOUR-SELF?
CUSTOMS

A Doctor Writes

AS a doctor I am often asked, "Doctor, why have you accused me of murdering my baby?"

The short answer is that I saw you on the telly and didn't like the look of you.

If you are worried about your doctor accusing you of murder there's not much you can do about it.

© *A Doctor.*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Ray Charles, famous singer and pianist

So. Farewell
Then Ray
Charles

Famous singer
And pianist.

You invented
"Soul".

One of your most
Famous songs was
'Hit The Road Jack'

And now, sadly,
You won't
Come back
No more
No more
No more
You'll never come back
No more.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

BIG BROTHER

An Apology From Channel Four

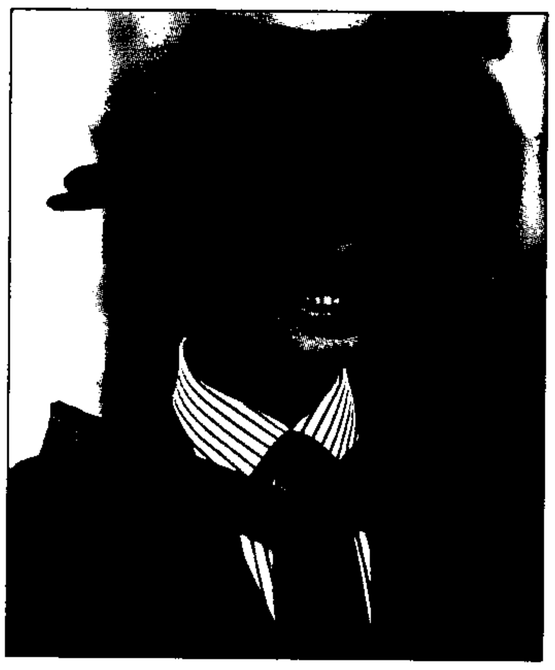
AS THE makers of Big Brother, we would like to apologise for the violence and debauchery which has unfortunately marred recent episodes of this popular reality entertainment show.

When we commissioned the latest series, peopled it with specially chosen exhibitionists, retards and mentally unstable individuals and then provided them with copious amounts of alcohol, we had no idea that scenes of drunkenness, fighting and lewd behaviour would ensue.

We were rather hoping for something more extreme, such as a multiple murder followed by a cannibalistic orgy, culminating in a mass suicide – leading to record viewing figures for Channel Four.

Sadly, we will have to make do with the disappointing ratings of a mere seven million viewers.

© *Mark Thomson, Head of Channel 4 and Director Elect of the BBC in cooperation with Enditall Productions.*

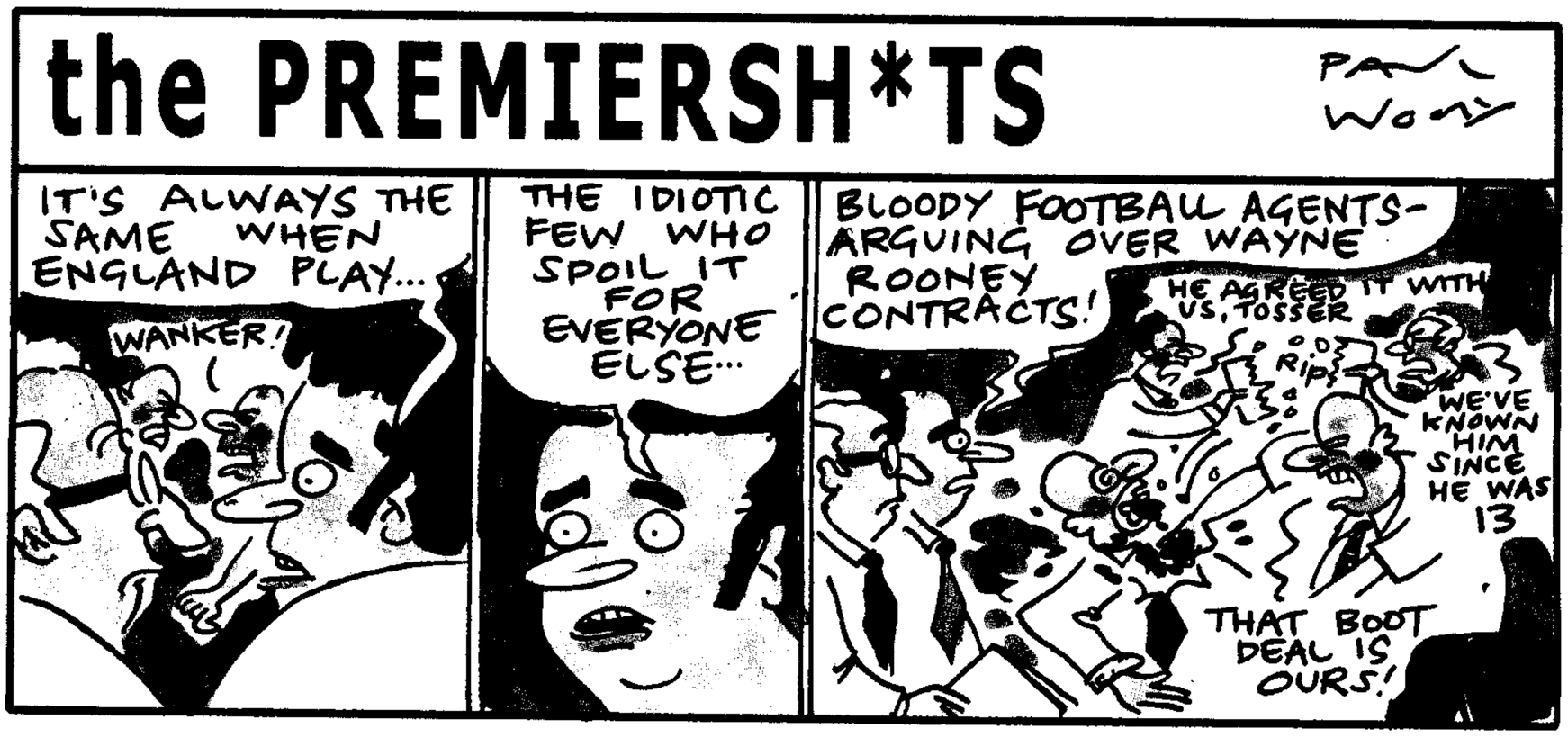


That Cork University Honorary Degree In Full

SALUTAMUS PIERCUS BROSNANICUS, ACTORUM HIBERNICUM POPULARUM CINEMATOGRAPHICUM. NOTABILE IN FILMUS ESPIONAGUS THRILLARICUM 'NOMEN EST BONDUS, JACOBUS BONDUS'. CELEBRATUS AGENTUS BRITANNICUS, CODEX OOVII, LICENSUS ASSASSINATUS. IN SUCCESSIONE SEANUS CONNERENSIS, GEORGIUS LAZENBENSIS, ROGERUS MORONICUS, SEANUS CONNERENSIS BIS, ET TIMOTHEUS DALTONICUS. VOCE POPULARE DICET 'PIERCUS BENE EST, SED NON BENE QUAM SEAN CONNERENSIS'. EXAMPLO 'MEDICUS NON', 'DIGITUS AUREUS' ET 'SEMPER DIAMONDES' (SATIS EST – EDITUS).

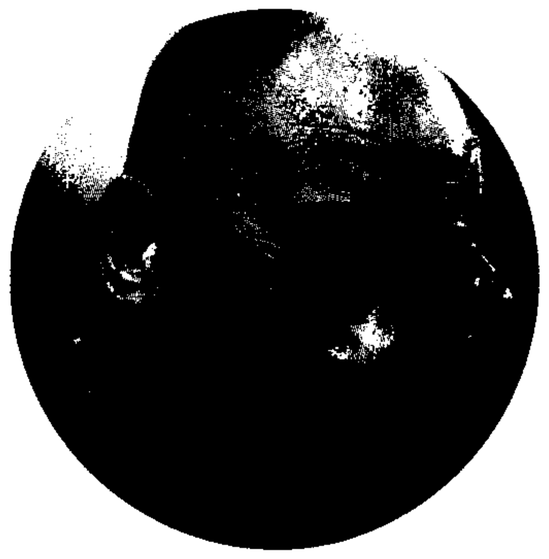
© The University of Cork (formerly Flannegan Bar and Post Office – bang on door and ask for Seamus).

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOLEY
IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME WHEN ENGLAND PLAY...
WANKER!
THE IDIOTIC FEW WHO SPOIL IT FOR EVERYONE ELSE...
BLOODY FOOTBALL AGENTS- ARGUING OVER WAYNE ROONEY CONTRACTS!
HE AGREED IT WITH US, TOSSER
RIP!
WE'VE KNOWN HIM SINCE HE WAS 13
THAT BOOT DEAL IS OURS!

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK



THE DALAI LAMA

Your Holiness, as the leader of the world's 2,500 million Buddhists, do you have a message with regard to spoons?

A drawer may be full of spoons. But each one has its own unique being. What we Buddhists call *sponyang*.

Could you explain to our readers what is meant by that concept?

Yes, it is simple. Each spoon has two polarities. On the one hand, we have the handle, that which we hold. On the other hand, there is the bit at the end, which we use to stir liquids, such as tea, yak's milk or lentil soup, and which we place in our mouths when we are eating.

Could you take us further down this path of enlightenment, Your Serene Highness?

Certainly. It is only when each aspect of the spoon is acting in harmony with the other that the spoon itself achieves self-realisation and becomes one with the Cosmic Will or *harikrishnan*.

And then what?

Ah. Now we are entering into the heart of the mystery of the spoon and its *karma*. How will it fulfil itself, in relation to fellow entities, such as, in particular, the knife and the fork? Three in one, knife, fork, spoon. Once we understand this we are at the beginning of our journey, and also, in a sense, at the end of it.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Yes and no. Spoons can make us laugh. They can make us sad. What they cannot do is bring us to wisdom. That we must find for ourselves. And once we find it, we must lose it.

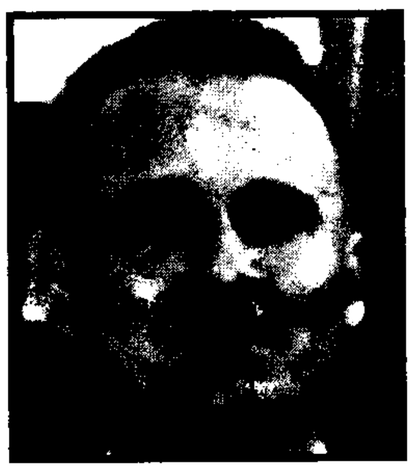
I'm afraid that's all we've got time for.

NEXT WEEK: Bill Cash 'Me And My Cash'.

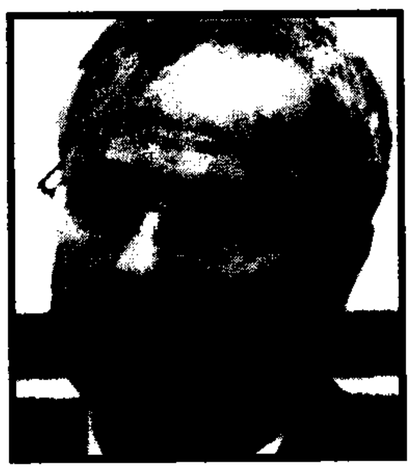
WHO'S WHO IN THE PARTY THAT HAS SHAKEN BRITISH POLITICS TO ITS FOUNDATIONS

The 12 UKIP MEPs Who Have Pledged Themselves To Tear Down The EU Brick By Brick'

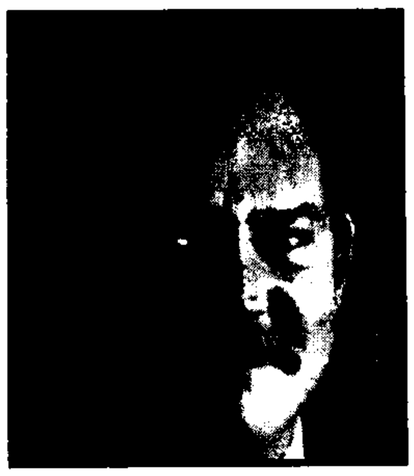
ASHLEY MOAT, South East, formerly chairman of Moat and Beam, the Surrey garden centre chain. Keen amateur bicyclist and Scrabble player.



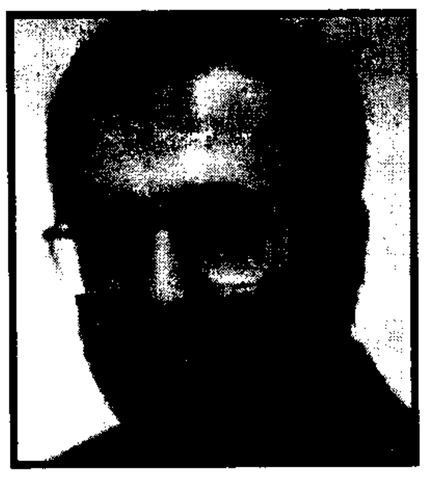
NIGEL BORAGE, South East, former manager of the HSBC, Chorleywood. Longtime addict of the Daily Telegraph crossword.



BILL DAFT, South West, runs a futon-importing business, 'U-Kip Soundly', in Paignton. Once represented Devon in a local kayak racing competition.



HUGO TREMLETT, East Midlands, former hotelier from Skegness, now vice-chairman of the South Derbyshire Morris Dancing and Model Railway Club.



GERALD WHEEN, Eastern, former poultry keeper in Norfolk. Once played the ukelele in the Saxmundham All Stars Skiffle Group.

DAVID WAGSTAFFE, North West, formerly entertainments officer of the Morecambe Marinerama and Aqualeisure Centre. Could be Foreign Secretary in a UKIP government.

MONTY PRATTWINKLE, West Midlands, retired whisky salesman for the Glen McHackey Distillery Co. Keen amateur golfer (handicap 48).

(That's enough UKIP superstars. Ed.)

"We don't call them beggars anymore. They're alms-seekers now"

News In Brief

LABOUR POST-MORTEM BEGINS

TONY BLAIR has reacted swiftly to his party's worst ever local and Euro election results by commissioning a far-reaching inquiry into what went wrong.

"Lord Hutton's initial findings are that Labour romped to victory in both elections, totally humiliating all the other parties, and that I'm the most popular Prime Minister there has ever been in the history of British politics," said Tony *(cont. p. 94)*

LATE HEALTH NEWS

The Health Secretary John Reid has pledged that the Government will cut the waiting time until another announcement on cutting NHS waiting times to just eighteen weeks.

"At present patients are waiting up to twenty four weeks for another empty promise about cutting NHS waiting times and we simply don't feel that's good enough," said John... *(cont. p. 94)*

KILROY-SILK UPDATE

NEWLY-ELECTED MEP Robert Kilroy-Silk says he's looking forward to travelling to Brussels, promising he'll "change the agenda of the European parliament".

"I'll be ensuring that, for a change, it's the issues that I know really matter to the people of Britain that are debated there.

"First up will be 'My wife says I'm too fat, so she left me for her lesbian lover', followed by 'Kinky sex games turned my husband into a depraved monster'."

SVEN LIFTS BAN ON PLAYERS

IT'S BEEN revealed that England's football manager, Sven-Goran Eriksson, has lifted the football ban on his England players.

A spokesman for the FA said, "Sven sincerely believes that the odd game of football won't risk disrupting the players' intense regime of writing columns, attending promotional events and having extra-marital nookie."

PROOF READER

To check advertisements prior to publication, accuracy and good understanding of the written Ebglish language essential. Every Monday night from 8pm, minimum 6 hours.

Auto Trader

BORESDAY

Cut-Out-And-Throw-Away Souvenir Of The [redacted] Greatest Day In The History Of Literature

MILLIONS of literature-lovers all over the world spent June 16 2004 reliving, minute-by-minute, the most famous day the world of books has ever known.

Now you too can join some of the world's greatest bores *(Surely "American professors of literature")* as they recreate via the internet every tiny detail of the day that has become universally known just as "Bore's Day".

It was exactly 100 years ago that James Joyce's legendary hero Leopold Bore got out of bed in a Dublin tenement and embarked on the events of the day which has inspired literary scholars ever since.

With the aid of this second-by-second guide, specially compiled for Private Eye by **Professor Arnold J. Pipesucker**, James Joyce Professor of Semiotics at Ithaca University, New Dworkin, Mass., you can follow every episode in the twenty-four hours which launched Leopold Bore into the pantheon of literary immortals.

Dubliners of the type that may have included Bore

James Joyce

Times And Places – Your Journey Through Bore's Day

8.10am
Bore gets out of bed at 245 Stalegrass Crescent (now demolished and site of Starbucks World of Coffee).

8.35
Bore puts on trousers and discovers one button missing.

9.11
Bore goes out to buy button at Molly's Buttons 'n' Bows haberdashery shop (now site of Phuwhatascorcha [Ireland] Video Games Megastore).

9.51
Bore watches No. 94 bus going by and muses on thoughts of ladies without any clothes on (today the 94 bus route to Ballymoney has been withdrawn from service, but the 81B travels much the same route).

10.36
Bore crosses De Valera Bridge over the Liffey and catches sight of his former schoolfriend, Fergus O'Cash (Bore would have known the De Valera Bridge as the William IV Bridge).

11.15
Bore enters O'Halloran's Bar on Casement Street (now the Shamrock Bistro) where he drinks a pint of Guinness while sneaking a look at the embonpoint of the barmaid Polly O'Worsthorne *(Click on thumbnail to see webcam of Polly's Naughty Night With Her Lesbian Friend).*

11.50
Bore falls asleep *(So do we. Ed.).*

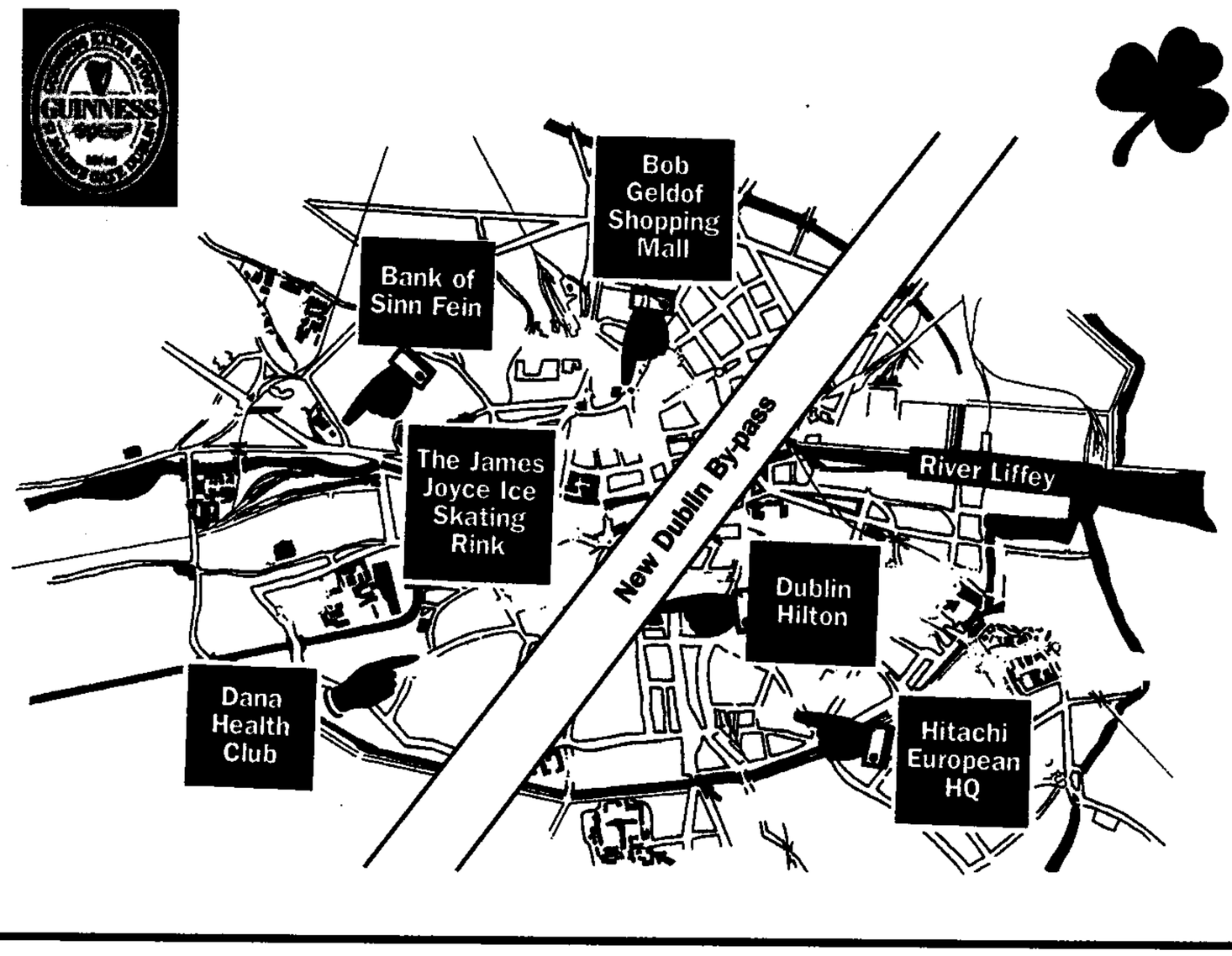
9.21pm
Bore wakes up, and walks home via St Stephen's Green (now Vodafone Park).

9.36
Bore notices lost button on floor and muses on mystery of human existence.

10.15
Bore falls asleep (again).

This unforgettable literary experience has been brought to you by Gnome Leisure Enterprises in association with the Arts Council of Ireland, the Irish Heritage Tourist Board, Aer Lingus and the European Union.

Bore's Dublin (as it is today)



DIARY

GEORGE CAREY: Beside The Seaside

The sea is, by its very nature, hugely impressive. It covers many acres of the earth, and is home to many thousands of fish, both big and small.

Impressive indeed!

Also noteworthy is the sea's wetness. It would take a foolish man to claim the sea was dry – because it certainly is not. It is in fact very damp, though no less impressive for that!

I once remarked to Nelson Mandela (a most impressive figure) that the sea is in many places very, very deep. That sage gentleman readily agreed with my diagnosis. By the look on his face, I felt I had provided an important lesson for us both.

I decide to purchase an ice-cream from the kiosk on the seafront. An ice-cream can be hugely refreshing on a hot summer's day. Taken in moderation as part of a balanced diet, ice-cream can be most enjoyable to eat – and, I might add, hugely refreshing. It's also hugely refreshing.

I point this out to the ice cream man. He inwardly digests my point before asking me what sort of ice-cream I would care for.

"Before I place my order, may I congratulate you on a most impressive selection of ice creams" I tell him. I then inform him that I am a keen Arsenal supporter, in fact very much so – but I trust he won't hold my support for "The Gunners" against me!!

I laugh good-naturedly at this, then turn to my fellow-citizens behind me in the queue. I inform them that I have always found this sort of easy-going banter a valuable way of "connecting" with individuals. After all, each and every one of us is an "individual". Let's not get hoity-toity about it!

"I trust I am betraying no confidences" I tell them, in an accessible manner, "but her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was most partial to a Strawberry Mivvi. Delightful lady, and a personal friend!"

"Make your mind up" says the ice-cream vendor. I thank him for his direct advice.

He strikes me as an intelligent and friendly man, with whom one could have a helpful, useful and valuable discussion. I survey the selection of ice creams on offer. Lolly or ice? Chocolate or fruit-based? In a tub or a cone – or on a stick? With or without a flake? I let him into my dilemma. "This is a very real and demanding challenge!" I comment, good-humouredly.

By this time, a multitude has gathered. By dint of personal conviction, I have now attracted many of my fellow human-beings to stand shoulder-to-shoulder behind me in the queue, shaking their fists in agreement. At times like this I know just how Jesus must have felt leading his disciples; and I find it deeply humbling.

I venture down to the Pier. We must always allow room for "fun" in our lives. Sitting next to an impressive youth on the "Big Wheel", I reflect that life is like a Big Wheel.

"One moment, you may be up. And the next moment, you may equally be down" I observe, "But you must always sit well back in your seat for safety and comfort"

He replies with an impressive Biblical allusion, delivered with a force and directness I greatly admire.

"Ark of" he says.

"Ah yes!" I say, "The Covenant!"

We have begun a meaningful dialogue.

"Oh, peace of!!" he says.

"...the Lord be always with you" I continue.

"God help us" he mumbles.

"Amen" I concur.

Off to watch Punch and Judy on the beach. It is, for all its undeniable ups and downs, a profoundly Christian marriage. From my own dealings with Mr Punch, I have long found him to be a most impressive individual, very different from his media image – outgoing, direct and with real authority.

Much has been made by the media of the sufferings of his wife Judy. It cannot be denied that she is a very popular figure who has managed to gain the sympathy of the crowds. But from my many private conversations with Mr Punch, over excellent dinners, superbly served on the finest silver by liveried staff, I have learnt that there are two sides to every story.

If circumstances have driven Mr Punch to hit his wife on the head over and over again with a big black stick, it is not for the rest of us to sit in judgement. Instead, we must sympathise. Might his undeniable sense of fun have been stifled by his marriage to a woman, who has – for all her undoubted qualities of persistent nagging – never really tried to understand him?

As I watch them together on the beach, I am struck by how very different they both are from the image projected by the media. Mr Punch is a warm and friendly fellow, his concerns deeply grounded in issues relevant to today. Far too much is made of him whacking Judy over the head with a stick. It is high time we looked beyond these playful thumps to the devoted husband beneath.

I spent the vast majority of the afternoon building a sandcastle on the beach. Sadly, through no fault of my own, I slipped and put my foot in it and squashed it flat.

There were many people on the beach that day, many of them building their own sandcastles. Frankly, it is only fair that they should shoulder their fair share of the blame for what happened to my castle. It sometimes saddens me how very little some other folk are prepared to give back to society.

Nevertheless, that castle had very real and lasting value. As I left the beach, I realised that I felt humbled – yes, deeply humbled – by my renewed sense of pride.

My diary confirms the truth of this observation. "One has done one's level best" it says, "and by all accounts the results have been hugely impressive".

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

HOW DID YOU USE YOUR VOTE IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS GARY?
WELL, LIKE A LOT OF PEOPLE I'M DISILLUSIONED WITH THE MAIN PARTIES...
I DIDN'T WANT TO VOTE LABOUR OR TORY OR LIBDEM...
SAME HERE.
BUT I DID WANT TO MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT HOW I FELT ABOUT THINGS.
SO HOW DID YOU VOTE? UKIP?
YEAH. I STAYED IN BED ALL DAY. SOD THE LOT OF THEM...

Literary Review

Camp followers

Stephen Spender: The Authorised Biography
John Sutherland
(Viking, £25)
Isherwood
Peter Parker
(Picador, £25)

HERE they come, back into sight for a while, those curious moons of Uranus: Isherwood and Spender, each of them given a doorstopping life of his own, but unable still to resist the pull of Auden's orbit.

Because, let's face it, but for Auden's leadership, but for what they did in the thirties under Auden's tutelage – along with other less remembered satellites, MacNeice, Day Lewis, Uncle Tom Commie and all, collectivised as "MacSpaunday" or, more humiliatingly, "The Auden Generation" – who would consider them worthy of such extensive and intimate (and frankly tedious) examination?

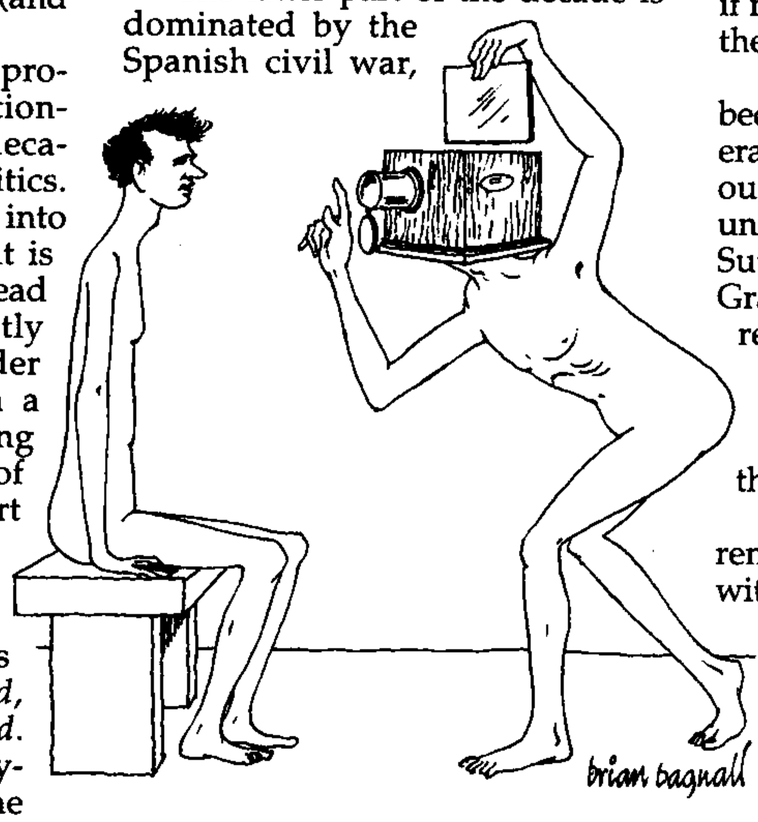
Okay, so "Herr Issyvoo" produced the Berlin stories, fictionalised reportage of Weimar decadence and glass-breaking politics. But if they hadn't been turned into a musical, filmed as *Cabaret*, it is doubtful anyone would still read them, let alone the indulgently self-regarding novels. Spender meanwhile bursts forth with a handful of very now-seeming poems in the crucible year of 1933 and is hailed as the "Rupert Brooke of the Depression".

Later both of them produce rather well received autobiographies, Isherwood's *Christopher and His Kind*, Spender's *World Within World*. These may be of interest to anyone curious as to what else the authors of *Goodbye to Berlin* and *Poems 1933* did with their lives, before and since the thirties. (They are of even greater interest to their biographers though, as sources, quoted *passim*.)

Both men were fellow travellers and the fellow they travelled with was Auden. They were members of an upper class, politically committed, sexually liberated coterie who, in Evelyn Waugh's envious words, "ganged up and stole the decade". But they followed the trail that Wystan blazed. If Auden went to Germany, so did Isherwood, later followed by Spender. They all shared a house in Portugal, Isherwood and Auden working on a play, while Spender went off in a huff with his "secretary", the aptly named Tony Hyndman.

What gay lives they all led! As a communist, of course, Spender wanted a classless society. But as a homosexual lover, it was *vive la différence* all the way: "Men of the same class just didn't," he declared. Isherwood likewise "couldn't relax sexually with a member of his own class". Yet somehow they did it: Auden with Isherwood, Isherwood with Spender. What shocked the others more than anything was when Spender went (more or less) straight, marrying the intellectually dominant and sexually voracious Inez, for whom he gave spongeboy Hyndman the heave-ho (the Cardiff-born catamite being thus more welshed against than Welsh).

The latter part of the decade is dominated by the Spanish civil war,



in which Spender manages to make a bit of an ass of himself. Having taken up the republican cause and used his oratorical skills to persuade impressionable young men to go and fight the fascists in Spain, he is horrified to discover that one of those who has actually joined the International Brigade is his beloved Tony. His guilt over Tony is no doubt exacerbated by Inez's "disloyalty" in having a fling with (among others) Freddie Ayer, the lecherous logical positivist.

No doubt Inez was just being loyal to herself, just as Stephen is being loyal to his ex-lover Hyndman when, under cover of writing up the war for the *Daily Worker*, he goes off to Spain to "rescue" him. He arrives to find Hyndman under arrest for desertion and lucky not to be shot. Comrade Spender pulls such strings as he can to secure his safe passage home on "medical" grounds.

Sutherland puts a better spin on this story of "Stephen's" touching naivety than the American novelist David Leavitt's version in *While England Sleeps*, which so infuriated Spender that he sued to have it suppressed.

Spender's reputation could only rise after that, and it is to his credit that when the Second World War broke out, while Auden and Isherwood fled to America – "we're backing Britten!" (the composer also fled) – Spender stayed to fight, if not the Germans, at least the fires they started.

In the latter part of his life he became increasingly involved in literary and cultural activism of various sorts, as an editor, arts envoy, university teacher (where Professor Sutherland briefly knew him) and Grand Old Man of Letters. He also remarried: Natasha was more loyal than Inez, and their daughter Lizzie married Barry Humphries (spooky!) Meanwhile the poetry, sidelined, suffered.

Over the same period Isherwood remained in America, hobnobbing with Hockney and taking a string of lovers (including that rum cove, Don Bachardy). He may have abandoned his adoring mother country, but at least he stayed true to his homosexual nature. He found in California the freedom and licence he'd sought in Weimar Germany. Separated from Auden, he took up with another guru (writing it all up in *My Guru and His Disciple*) and became, in the hippy era, a sort of guru himself. (Perhaps they thought running away from war was the same as being a peacenik.)

Parker concludes by quoting Socrates' assertion that the unexamined life is not worth living. But Isherwood's problem is that his life never ceased to be examined, in obsessive detail, in almost every book he wrote. He kept copious diaries (later published to great offence) and worked the same material into his novels. Spender was almost as self-obsessed, saying he felt "skewered on the gaze of everyone" just walking down the street. Neither life went unexamined. Indeed, they were so full of themselves, it seems redundant for anyone else to start singing their praises.

In Malcolm Bradbury's novel *Stepping Westward*, there's an American academic called Hamish Wagner who was once (appropriately in this context) an Auden scholar. "Only I had to quit," he says. "I got this terrible feeling that even *he* hadn't looked at his own poems as carefully as I had." He began to feel more like Auden than Auden himself, and it drove him mad. As biographers, both Parker and Sutherland display similar symptoms. They just can't stop going on about their subjects, and after more than 1500 pages the reader feels trapped by a pair of prize bores.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

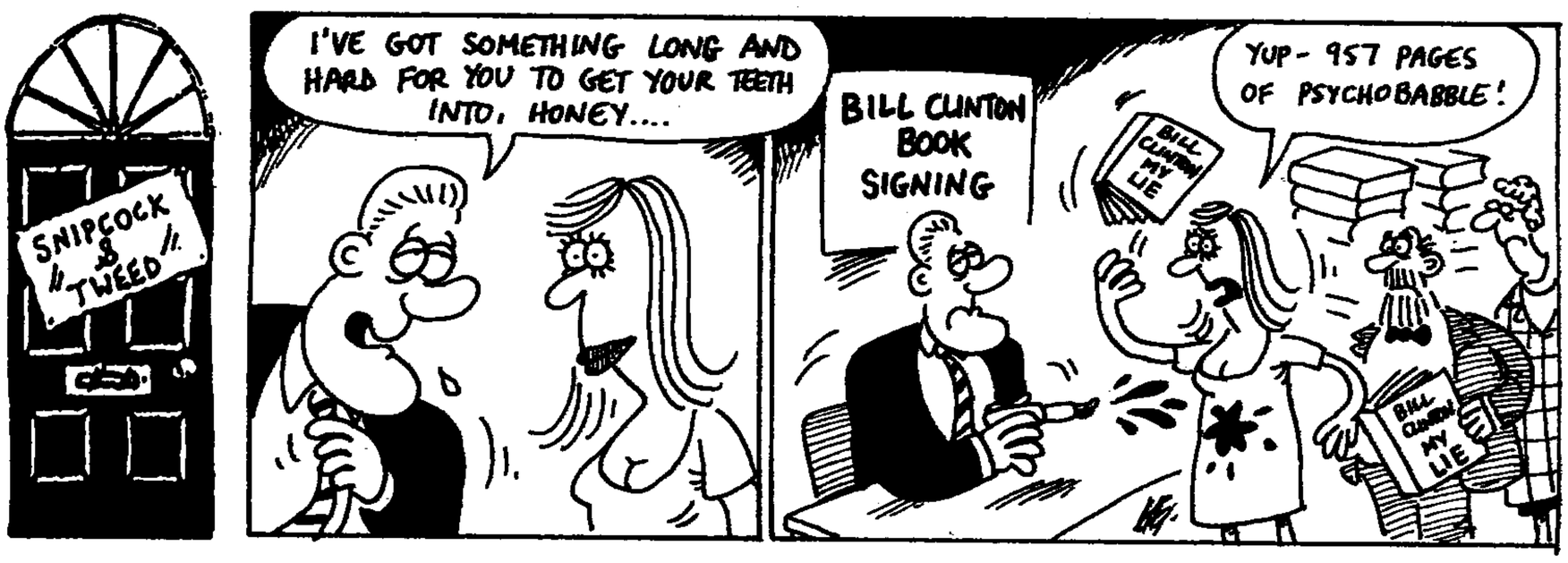
WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Making of Henry
Howard Jacobson
(Cape, £12.99)

MOISHE sits on the sofa, sad, sixty-plus Moishe with his big, barnstorming nose, that hectoring Hebrew hooter of his, and his secret knowledge, mysteriously uncountenanced by gentiles, that at some point in his life he will die, and stares at the woman. Moishe believes he knows exactly where it all began, back in that grim South Manchester terrace with his lachrymose pappa Izzi (Orthodox enough, *oy ve*, but not above a little fragrant fraternising with the *goyim* you understand) nurturing his collection of tram tickets, and the rabbi's beard falling in the gefiltefish soup.

All that.

"Does it really have to end this way?" the woman asks. The woman is like every other woman he has known, like one-eyed Mrs Myerscough with her long – not big but elongated – breasts between which he had pushed his timid Jewish face all those long years ago


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
I'VE GOT SOMETHING LONG AND HARD FOR YOU TO GET YOUR TEETH INTO, HONEY....
BILL CLINTON BOOK SIGNING
YUP - 957 PAGES OF PSYCHOBABBLE!
BILL CLINTON MY LIE
BILL CLINTON MY LIE

— and yet not like. A beauty she is, with her enticing thumbs and her vertiginous declivities. He would like to lick her face. She is the colour of strawberry opal fruits. Her profile is like a golf tee.

"Why does it always have to end this way?" she asks.

His father was right. Women are different from men. Old Izzi, who may well have covertly fucked Mrs Maria Yoffenberg in the Midland Hotel, Salford, in 1957. Fancy him knowing that.

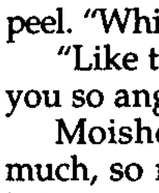
Tears rip his eyes like rent orange peel. "Which way?" he wonders.

"Like this. What is it that makes you so angry?"

Moishe considers. There is so much, so much that must be taken into consideration. Those South Manchester dawns. His best friend, Cosmo Finkelstein, stealing the protractor from his desk that day in 1953. Teaching at the polytechnic in Lincolnshire. Mamma's cabbage soup. Death. Women never understand these things.

"You don't understand these things," he tells her.

"Christ!" she remarks airily. "You sound like a character in one of those Howard Jacobson novels. You know, another one of those sad Jewish losers droning on about women and how terrible it is that we're all going to die and what did I do to deserve this... [*continues*]



Books & Bookmen

■ "I'M NOT someone who mourns publicly," said Sara Payne, mother of murdered schoolgirl Sarah Payne, recently. "I can only let go on my own."

An admirable sentiment diminished somewhat by being expressed in a full-page interview in the *Observer*. The purpose was to promote her Hodder book about the whole sorry affair. As for her husband and surviving children: "They all have their own perspective and I'm sure their story would be almost a different story."

They may of course decide to

"I just have this need to qualify everything I say...well, nearly everything."

keep their "different stories" to themselves. However, with TV's Kevin Wells rumoured to be in the market for a nicely earnest cash-in book on Soham, it appears a monetary value can be placed on grief all too easily.

The *Observer* interview was not Payne's only promotional outing. The *News of the World* organised a reader offer, selling the book at a bargain price; while her pale, drawn face was all over the regional press. In the immediate aftermath of their daughter's death, the Paynes could be forgiven their media ubiquity, as they tried to make sense of it all and raise awareness of the dangers facing parents and children. However, from being a tragic, dazed, grieving figure, Mrs Payne is now in danger of appearing and being treated as merely another "celebrity" with a ghost-written book to flog.

■ SPOTTED at the Orange Prize ceremony: Virago chief Lennie Goodings throwing a rolled-up ball of paper at chair of the judges Sandi Toksvig, shortly after it was announced that the prize had gone to Andrea Levy rather than Virago's offering, Gillian Slovo.

Presumably Goodings thought, rather unfairly, that Toksvig – who is published by Time Warner, which also owns Virago – should have ensured the judges favoured Slovo. If so, she is clearly unaware how awards panels work.

Had Toksvig batted for Slovo or any other author, this would have counted for nothing if a majority of the other judges didn't agree. Sticking up for your authors is one thing, but resorting to aerodynamic origami merely makes one look like a bad loser.

■ PERHAPS inevitably, supermarket book supplier Cork International has collapsed after several months in receivership.

Publishers will have to write off the majority of the £12m they are owed by Cork, but will such an expensive lesson bring them to their senses? Will publishers realise it is ultimately financially suicidal to continue acceding to the discount demands of supermarkets, who are used to dealing with gigantic food suppliers who keep prices low by exploiting cheap immigrant labour? Probably not.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ IT'S amazing what you can lift out of a skip – especially one parked outside a local library.

A new hi-tech "Discovery Centre" is being built in Gosport, Hampshire, to replace the old library. As reported in *Eye* 1107, many users are unhappy about the poor temporary facilities in a "hut" on the staff car park of the local museum. However, *Eye* reader Richard Watt was more disturbed by the wholesale dumping of perfectly good books into two skips over a couple of days in March.

Leaving aside the loss of good reference books, the dumping is an absurd waste of money when they could surely have been sold to a second-hand book dealer. Among the attractive hardbacks Mr Watt skimmed from the skip was a 1915 tome *A Glossary of Tudor and Stuart Words*, by Professor Walter Skeat. This book alone is currently being sold by book dealers at prices starting from £30.

However, at a "consultation meeting" earlier this year Mr Watt and his fellow Gosport residents were proudly told by library bosses that the Hampshire service had 125 Harry Potter books.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"For psychologists, dogs may be the new chimpanzees." — Professor Paul Bloom, *Science*.

"Imperial revisionism is the new black." — Niall Ferguson, *Independent*.

"Nude is the new black." — EasyJet in-flight magazine.

"Green is the new black, says funeral director." — *Leicester Mercury*.

"Green is the new red." — Peter Tatchell, *Guardian*.

"Whisky is set to be the new vodka." — *The Scotsman*.

"Oak is the new pine." — Glasgow *Herald*.

"Aggressive earnings management is the new creative accounting." — Begbies Traynor Forensic Accounting Group (London).

Pseuds Corner

Let me not give the impression that there is no grief and sorrow here. Each spring morning, we have a daily sadness. Frogs, which have swum happily in one of the underground streams beneath my garden, squeeze their way through cracks in the wall above the lawn and luxuriate in the dew on the grass until the sun comes out. Then they dehydrate. Those which I cannot revive with a watering can wither into desiccated corpses that remind me of the dead in Pompeii. But next spring there will be frog spawn in the old horse trough by my garden gate.

ROY HATTERSLEY
Guardian

Candidates must be fluent in English and at least one another language, including but not limited to foreign languages, computer languages, English dialects or the vocabulary of music, art or science.

Advertisement for *Guardian* journalist training programme

Our culinary herb list is very limited, just rosemary, sage, thyme, French tarragon, oregano, lovage, fennel, chives, mint, parsley, basil, garlic, coriander and dill. That's all.

MONTY DON
Observer

...young British art has ended in flames in an east London warehouse. The setting seems singularly appropriate for its Viking send-off. Leyton is part of the post-apocalyptic east London landscape this art always mythologised – this art born in scrappy sidestreets of the capital, with a kebab shop across the road and Charles Saatchi's Rolls pulling up outside. Now, some of the best recent British art is ash where Lea Bridge Road opens on to the Dantean wastes of the Hackney Marsh.

JONATHAN JONES
Guardian

Aerial dance performer Wendy Hesketh presents an innovative fusion of performance technique: using a bungee rope to amplify her themes and movements. She flies over and around the stage, hangs upside down above a huge 'toilet' and hovers vertically, screaming and kicking to be allowed to stay there. What better way to demonstrate the highs and lows of bulimia...

KATIE PHILLIPS
Total Theatre Magazine

Once or twice a week, I dress up and wear big, dangly earrings and stuff from the shop: Elle's [Elle Macpherson's] underwear, Diane von Furstenberg... Both have houses on the island. If people are coming to dinner, David and I spend hours styling little tableaux of interesting objects. How things look is terribly important. Sometimes I look at the washing line and think: "Hmm, those colours are very bad together."

Model INDIA HICKS discusses life on her Bahamian island, *Sunday Times Magazine*

So perhaps the only point is one of acceptance. Or rather, for us, all questions must be reduced to only one question: not what does it mean, but how does this play come alive?
– So is the Duke good or bad? asks my nephew again.
– Exactly the point! That is exactly it! I shriek, much to his surprise.

In the ensuing silence I take a bite of my chicken, my body responds and I think of the mountains.

SIMON McBURNEY, programme notes to NT production of Measure for Measure

CONTRIBUTORS: Robert Waterhouse, Philippa White (and many others), Joanna Guthrie, Phil Carter, Caroline Barton, Hugh Levinson, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

ROACCUTANE

SPOT THE SIDE-EFFECTS

THE decision of the New York state attorney Elliot Spitzer to prosecute Britain's biggest drug company GSK for poisoning children with the anti-depressant Seroxat has cheered the families of many British people whose children have suffered similarly from other drugs.

Cathy Perkins from south-east London has been trying for years to get justice for her son Jack, 20, whose mouth disintegrated after taking the anti-acne drug Roaccutane. Three years later he still can't eat properly and has to drink through a straw.

Jack's plight was raised in the Commons last year by Clive Efford, Mrs Perkins's MP; and she has been contacted by people all over Britain who believe they are also victims of Roaccutane. Many of them are suing Roche, the enormously rich and secretive Swiss-based firm that makes and markets Roaccutane.

Jack Perkins: Has to drink through a straw since taking Roaccutane

Earlier this year Mrs Perkins received a letter from Elaine Fisher of Reading whose son, Chris Ballard, 32, a champion kick-boxer, shot himself in his Reading flat in January. At first the family assumed he was upset by a rift with a girlfriend, though they were puzzled by this explanation since Chris had not expressed any particular distress and plainly enjoyed life.

Then, rummaging through his belongings, the family found delivery receipts for two boxes of Roaccutane from a company in France. One of the most prominent side effects of Roaccutane is depression and violent mood swings, but the information about these side effects were in French – and Chris Ballard couldn't read French. He had ordered the drug without prescription over the internet. Though he did not have acne, he thought it might smooth his leathery skin.

Reading coroner Peter Bedford sent a sample of Chris's blood to Roche, but the company said the sample had been subjected to sunlight and so was flawed. The coroner said there was no proof Roaccutane had contributed to Chris's suicide, but observed: "There is a suggestion of a potential link between the drug and suicide." Roche put out a standard statement of sympathy with the family, but stressed that 13 million people across the world had been "treated successfully" with Roaccutane.

One influential family to suffer from Roaccutane is that of US Democratic congressman Bart Stupak who has just introduced a bipartisan bill into Congress to "regulate and track" the drug. In a statement on 16 June Mr Stupak, whose son hanged himself while taking the drug, said it was no longer possible to rely on the food and drug administration (FDA) to control the drug which "causes severe birth defects and is linked to adverse psychiatric effects including suicides".

FACT TO REMEMBER: In the early 1980s there was a press scare about a popular sleeping pill called Halcion. The drug was suspected of causing suicidal behaviour and several people committed suicide after taking it. The manufacturer, Upjohn, and the government's medicines safety regulator assured the public there was nothing to worry about Halcion. Five years later it was banned.

IMMIGRATION DETAINEES

It's criminal

LAST WEEK Anne Owers, chief inspector of prisons, condemned "filthy and dilapidated" Lindholme, an immigration detention centre in Doncaster, for its "prison culture" and questioned whether it should continue to be used for asylum seekers and immigration detainees.

But it is not just in immigration centres that asylum seekers are treated worse than criminals. Last year one in 30 of those held in London police cells was an asylum seeker or immigration detainee awaiting deportation. And unlike those accused of a crime who have to be brought before a court within 24 hours, immigration detainees are being held in police cells – often without access to washing facilities, clean clothes or exercise – for days.

People like Constance Muganda (not her real name), a Ugandan national who had been in police detention for 96 hours when she was "found" by two independent police custody visitors. Brought there by the immigration service, she had been held alone in a cold 10ft by 6ft cell. She had to wait for a police officer to respond to a bell to take her out of the cell to the wash basin. She had no change of clothing and she could only have a shower if a female police officer was available to escort her.

Although Constance had been served with deportation papers she was confused and appeared not to understand. She had been unable to contact her solicitor, who had changed firms. She did not even have a friend to pack a suitcase for her; and as far as the police visitors were able to ascertain, she was returned to Kampala with only the clothes she stood up in – her belongings left in the UK.

A study by the Camden independent custody visitors found the average time immigration detainees were held in police cells was 45 hours and the longest was nearly five days. There were also concerns that they had no access to duty immigration lawyers (in the way that those accused of a crime can get emergency access to a solicitor); and were quite possibly being whisked out of the country without their cases being properly scrutinised. Some are picked up in street sweeps, some brought in on behalf of the immigration service, but only a few are detained in relation to an offence.

The report suggests police do the best they can when holding immigration detainees, but it is fundamentally not the police force's job. It is also a very expensive way to crack down on illegal immigrants. The cost of such primitive accommodation to the taxpayer is £280 for the first 12 hours and up to £2,780 for seven days. If humanitarian grounds and pressure from disgruntled Knacker of the Yard doesn't bring about change, perhaps spiralling costs will.

PFI

Leak stew

THE *Eye*'s special investigation into the private finance initiative (*Eye* 1102, 19 March), exposed the fact that many PFI deals are not recorded in the government's books, nor even in the accounts of the private firms responsible for the contracts themselves.

Now it appears that the national audit office (NAO) had been investigating this discrepancy in secret for some weeks before that *Eye* special issue came out. "EXPOSED: LABOUR'S 'DODGY DEALS'" was the headline in the *Sunday Times* on 30 May. The paper claimed to have seen "leaked minutes of an influential treasury committee" proving that "creative accounting is rife in government contracts with the private sector".

The February meeting of the financial reporting advisory board (FRAB) was told by the audit office that 24 out of 27 PFI schemes investigated were not on the books of the treasury nor the private companies involved. FRAB's job is to regulate government accountancy practices, and its members were not at all impressed with the figures for PFI projects. They asked the NAO to "suggest changes in the treasury's accountancy practices".

The *Sunday Times* suggested that if all the PFI projects came back on the government books, the chancellor would have to account for "another £100bn of borrowing". This is probably an exaggeration, but even a few extra billion of public spending would take the figures way beyond Gordon Brown's "golden rule" that all public spending has to be met by government income.

The *Sunday Times* piece ended with a quote from shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin, who described the figures as "disturbing". But Mr Letwin should not get too excited. New Labour pinched the idea of PFI – including the "creative accounting" involved – from the Tories.

A fix from IFX

"RESTORING Trust" is the optimistic name given to the report by a high-powered group of businessmen calling themselves Tomorrow's Company. The group has spent 18 months finding out why so many big companies (Enron, Worldcom, Shell, etc) have behaved so badly.

A glance at the record of two of the leading figures in Tomorrow's Company gives some idea how much trust will be restored.

The chairman was Sir Richard Sykes, former chairman of GlaxoSmithkline, the company accused by the New York state attorney-general of poisoning children with the anti-depressant Paxil (Seroxat). Sykes's company pension was miraculously increased by £300,000 a year just before he retired.

Another prominent Tomorrow's Company member is Edmond Warner, chief executive of a financial trading and betting firm called IFX, and a regular columnist in the *Guardian* on stock market investment.

Warner has just come up with an ingenious solution to the problem of investing in hedge funds. The financial services authority (FSA) has banned hedge fund investment to everyone except the "experts", but Warner's firm has announced a new way for ordinary punters to have a go. Instead of buying shares in the fund, which is not allowed by the regulator, through IFX they can buy "contracts for difference" on the price of the fund.

Mr Warner says this is an "exciting product". And he's right. It exposes the punters to exactly the same risks and losses as direct investment in a hedge fund itself. A clear case of restoring trust if ever there was one.

POTTERS BAR

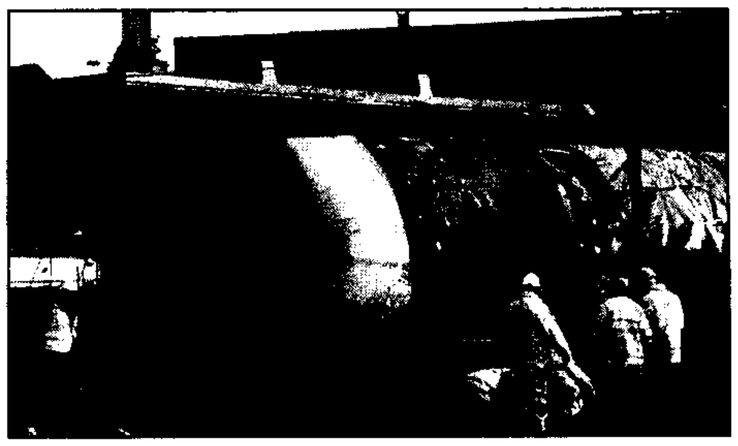
Railtrack backtrack

SHORTLY after the Potters Bar rail crash two years ago, Railtrack (now known as Network Rail) made front page news by announcing that it was to compensate generously the families of the seven victims who had died. Even though at that stage no blame had been laid at its door, Railtrack said families might expect payments of up to £1m each.

"We will start paying out right away, so it means that legal niceties don't get in the way of people's claims," said a spokesman at the time.

That no doubt was before bosses twigged that four of the seven who died were young adults with no dependants, and a fifth was 80-year-old Agnes Quinlivan, who died when part of a bridge fell on her. Under a controversial provision of the fatal accidents act, there is no obligation to pay compensation, other than around a nominal insulting £10,000, to families who were not financially dependent on victims aged over 18.

So that, in fact, is all that is on the table for the victims' families – a long way short of the "£1m, depending on the circumstances" that was being touted round Fleet Street. And while the public might think families have been duly compensated,



behind the scenes Network Rail and Jarvis have been fighting to hold on to every penny, even though they have now both accepted liability for the crash.

As the disaster showed, both have been adept at false media manipulation. *Eye* readers will recall how Jarvis quickly blamed vandals for what in fact turned out to be its own failure to maintain the track.

The derisory offer contrasts starkly with the way relatives of the 31 who died in the Ladbroke Grove disaster were treated. About a third of the victims of the 1999 crash were young adults without dependants, but ex-gratia payments, believed to run well into six figures, were made to their families as an acknowledgement of their loss. Network Rail is involved in both settlements, but rather conveniently relies on confidentiality agreements to prevent the bereaved families of Potters Bar finding out that they are being treated completely differently to their bereaved counterparts of Ladbroke Grove.

SPLIT CAPITAL TRUSTS

Ha-Ha-Hargreaves Lansdown

WHILE the big investment trust companies continue to refuse to cooperate with the regulator over the "splits" scandal, the financial services authority (FSA) has hooked at least one transgressor.

Stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown coughed up a penalty of £300,000 for misleading investors about its inappropriately-named "secure growth portfolio", a collection of investments in special zero coupon preference shares in split capital trusts which were marketed as "low risk".

For a while, the FSA found, this was a fair description. By 2001, however, the trusts had taken on high levels of borrowing and holdings in other split capital trusts and investment trusts (just the sort of practice that was so prevalent on Wall Street immediately before the Great Crash of 1929), exposing the shares, including the zeros, to significantly higher risk.

Unfortunately Hargreaves Lansdown didn't tell its customers about these risky practices. The FSA's director of enforcement concluded: "Hargreaves Lansdown failed to keep its customers in the picture at a time when a number of the securities in which their funds were invested were changing dramatically and has failed to produce any adequate explanation for why it did not do so."

Hargreaves Lansdown, now one of the country's biggest brokerages, was formed in Bristol in 1981 by Peter Hargreaves and Stephen Lansdown, who still run the firm today.

In November last year Peter Hargreaves was a judge in the South West Awards for Financial Information, assessing the "clarity and transparency of financial information" (and enjoying a sumptuous presentation ceremony at the Hotel du Vin into the bargain). In 2002 Stephen Lansdown led the campaign by disgruntled Railtrack shareholders for compensation after Stephen Byers put the company into administration in 2001 on the grounds that shareholders had been misled by the government.

Hargreaves Lansdown is now in the process of agreeing compensation for all the investors who lost money as a result of their misleading financial statements.

NUCLEAR PRIVATISATION

Cleaning up

IF YOU run a public company and run up a pre-tax loss of £303m, and you are in your right mind, you are unlikely to think seriously about privatisation. But that doesn't seem to worry Mike Parker and his merry men who run the state-owned British Nuclear Fuels company (BNFL).

Announcing his terrible results, Mr Parker points out blithely that almost all the company's loss-making features – like the decommissioning of the Magnox power stations and the fuel operations at Sellafield – are due to be transferred to a new company called the nuclear decommissioning agency (DNA).

When that happens, Mr Parker observes, what's left of BNFL will be earning fat fees for running the stations with none of the financial or environmental risks. Hey presto! A loss of £303m will be turned into a likely profit of £250m and make BNFL a nice plump prize, highly suitable for privatisation, while the messy business of decommissioning, etc, will be left with the government (taxpayer).

As *Eye* readers will recall, very much the same sort of thing happened to what used to be the ministry of defence's evaluation and research agency, DERA. The juicy profitable bits were privatised under a suitably absurd new Labour name (Qinetiq). The owners and directors of Qinetiq, including the very rich Carlyle group, are now reported to be in secret talks with the ministry of defence about a "full float" (total privatisation) before the next general election.

The Qinetiq directors will get about £70m from the deal, and the Carlyle Group (one of whose directors is former prime minister John Major) will get even more. Meanwhile DERA's liabilities (expensive and unpleasant things like cleaning up old weapons sites) will be met by the taxpayer.

PENSION FUNDS

Fill yer Boots?

EVERYONE now agrees that pensions is the big social issue of the day, and that there is an urgent need to assure people that they will get a secure income in old age. But here's what happens when a big company tries to do something about it.

The big high street retailer Boots has an enormous pension fund of more than £2bn built up over the years by the contributions of the company and its employees. What to do with all that money? Some years ago, in 2000, the people responsible for the fund, headed by the company's corporate finance chief John Ralfe, decided the traditional method of investing the pension money via an uncertain stock market did not guarantee a decent pension for the workers.

They therefore decided surreptitiously to switch the huge assets in the fund out of stocks and shares and into much safer bonds. These bonds, issued among others by the World Bank and the European Development Bank, might produce a lower return than the traditional stocks the pension fund invested in, but they were safer for the pensioners. Indeed, the bonds were so secure that it was possible to calculate almost exactly how much return they would produce; and possible therefore to balance the income from the bonds with the pensions that would be paid out. In other words, the new method was a form of guarantee to pensioners that the standard method of investment could not provide.

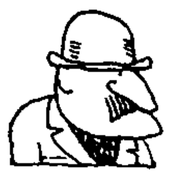
By skilful and quiet switching of the assets of the fund over a number of months, Ralfe and co managed to transfer the whole lot into bonds by the end of 2001. They were then able to assure the company's pensioners that their pensions were effectively guaranteed. Moreover, this guarantee had been achieved by switching the assets of the pension fund without anyone in the ever-alert City noticing.

There was some opposition within Boots – notably from the non-executive directors who are appointed to the board to protect the interests of people outside the company. One such, John Buchanan, finance director of BP, a company not best known for its vanishing pension fund deficit, is reported to have been especially indignant about the switching of the Boots pension fund money. But those who supported the policy were able to show not only that pensioners were much more secure under the new system, but that the company itself and its shareholders were protected against violent and often very expensive swings in the value of the pension fund.

Moreover, the management of the fund cost far less. Under the old scheme, the labyrinthine (and luxurious) workings of fund management cost the fund £10m a year. Under the new one, the system needed much less "fund management", and cost only £300,000 a year.

Everything went perfectly well at first. In 2002, John Ralfe left the company and David Thompson, Boots's finance director, retired. The new finance director was Howard Dodd, who had previously been employed by the drugs firm Astra Zeneca. Dodd and his new team have now decided to switch 15 percent of the pension fund (about £450m) out of the safe bonds. Where has this money gone? All the firm will say is that it has gone "somewhere different". Thus Boots pensioners are told that a huge slice of their money is being shifted but they can't know where.

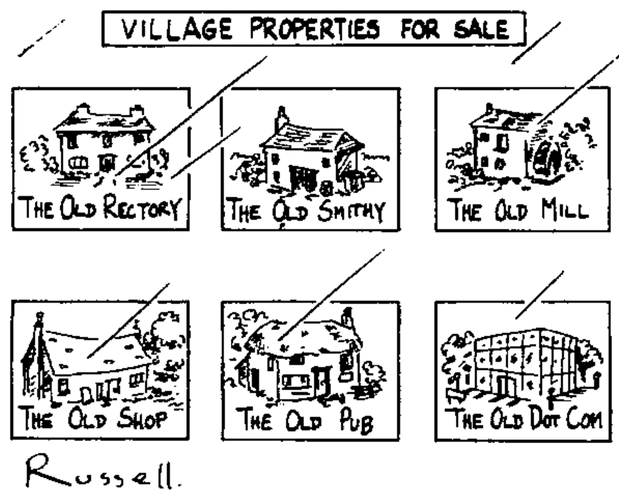
Why? One interpretation might be that the City of London and its army of overpaid fund managers have grown increasingly irritated by the proof from Boots that pensioners can be protected without investing their money in fashionable (and highly risky) hedge funds or other stock exchange potential money-spinners. These provide fund managers with huge salaries and an agreeable life style, and the switching of the £450m is a sign that these gentlemen are not going to relax their grip on pension fund money without a tussle.



In the City

MORE than two years after launching its £400m price-fixing raids on six drug company suppliers to the National Health Service, the Serious Farce Office is still in the foothills of an investigation that is assuming the proportions of a financial and legal Everest.

Millions of seized documents have been analysed and many interviews have been carried out. That process continues. The investigation is now understood to be expanding to include compulsory questioning of drug distributors and wholesalers as potential witnesses against the suppliers. However, no interviews are believed to have yet taken place with executives from the six target companies – the usual signal that charges are in the pipeline.



Those with knowledge of the investigation suggest that a potentially strong case is being built against the six companies based on a combination of documentary evidence and testimony from at least one insider. This combination is said to provide strong support for allegations of collusion to fix prices and over-charge for penicillin antibiotics and the blood-thinning drug warfarin, as well as deception of the NHS over the true costs of the generic drugs supplied. Some companies have already advised those executives most involved to obtain independent legal advice.

But charges may still not materialise before the end of this year, which would mean any trial would be unlikely before 2006 given the snail-shaming pace of the British courts.

Contrast this with the performance across the Atlantic of US prosecutors who continue to crack on much more effectively with addressing similar corporate crimes of over-charging the American taxpayer for drugs paid for by its Medicare and Medicaid programmes. Last month Pfizer became the latest drug giant to put its hands up to criminal fraud charges and agree to write out a very large cheque to prevent senior suits testifying or even going to prison. Pfizer paid a total of $430m, including the second largest-ever criminal fine of $240m, over the marketing of an epilepsy drug.

This followed three civil and criminal settlements last year which saw Abbott Laboratories pay a total of $600m, including a $200m criminal fine; AstraZeneca pay a total of $355m; Bayer pay $257m and GlaxoSmithKline $88m. The record fine was the $875m paid in 2001 by Abbott and Takeda Chemical of Japan.

So during the period that the NHS counter-fraud unit and the SFO have been investigating the six UK suppliers – subsidiaries of the US based Ivax, the German giant Merck, the Indian group Ranbaxy as well as the British companies Kent Pharmaceuticals, Goldshield and Regent-GM Laboratories – at a cost running into millions of pounds, US prosecutors have collected more than $2bn. Go figure!

True, the department of health is also pursuing the same six companies through the civil courts seeking compensation. But like the criminal investigation, that could take years and incur further substantial legal costs.

That the NHS will win the civil cases seems fairly certain. The issue may well be just how much it is prepared to settle for that the companies will agree to pay. Having set out its stall at £400m – although it has not claimed that total yet in the civil cases – it could be difficult to settle for far less. But whether the five smaller companies – only Merck can be considered an industry giant – will be able to afford the huge sums paid by their bigger US rivals seems unlikely. The drug companies would like a deal to settle what otherwise could be a very painful exercise. But so far the NHS has played hard ball, relying on the growing pressure created by the criminal investigation.

But the drug companies are unlikely to pay until the criminal case is resolved because of double jeopardy. However, unlike in the US, the SFO has very limited abilities to cut the plea bargains which have proved so successful in the American drug company cases. Furthermore, only the attorney-general (in the public interest) can agree to halt any prosecution once it starts. Which suggests that the window of opportunity for any deal may have to be before any charges are brought but after there are arrests and police bail. But any deal which failed to prosecute the guilty companies and their owners or chief executives could cause an uproar that immunity had been bought with a big cheque – a choice usually unavailable to criminals.

The SFO investigation is understood to have uncovered a substantial paper trail incriminating the companies in a determined policy to mislead the NHS about costs, supplies and prices from 1996. There are said to be detailed, multi-page reports of meetings in hotels at which prices were fixed. Reports, agendas and minutes showing the collusion were produced by all six companies.

As a result not only was the taxpayer over-charged but the NHS was prevented from discovering the truth about costs and so was discouraged from obtaining alternative suppliers. The companies also colluded to control the supplies of certain generic drugs thereby forcing up the prices of what were supposed to be cheap alternatives to branded products.

The SFO is believed to have at least one co-operating witness who was present at many of these meetings and who would be able to back up the story laid out by the internal documents although his health is said to be a potential problem. So it could be very difficult for the SFO to justify dropping any prosecution once charges have been brought unless the six companies come up with really serious money.

Conversely, if the companies do take the US route, it could also be a tough call for the SFO given the choice of taking what is on the table and possibly some guilty corporate pleas against the risk of a lengthy and very costly criminal trial in uncharted territory with an uncertain result and a guaranteed Serious Farce/Seriously Flawed outcry if it failed to win convictions.

But normally money talks. It may just be a question of getting the price right.

FURTHER evidence of the inability of the British legal system to deal expeditiously with financial crime is provided by the remarkable decision after four years by the Department of Timidity & Inaction, as ever living down to its reputation, to ask magistrates to agree to the prosecution of the City Slickers Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell for market manipulation regarding share tips in their *Daily Mirror* columns during 1999 and 2000.

It is merely worth noting that fallen home fashion icon Martha Stewart is due to be sentenced next month for lying to the FBI in 2002 about a 2001 share deal!

However, it is by no means certain that this belated DTI decision to prosecute will survive the anticipated legal challenges. The charges of "creating a misleading impression as to the value of investments… by using the City Slickers column in the *Daily Mirror* to tip those investments" (in other words share ramping enabling those who were in to get out) are novel and largely untested. They are also somewhat less than insider-dealing which the *Eye* has always said looked a non-starter as the two spivs were never insiders even if they did deal ahead of *Mirror* readers.

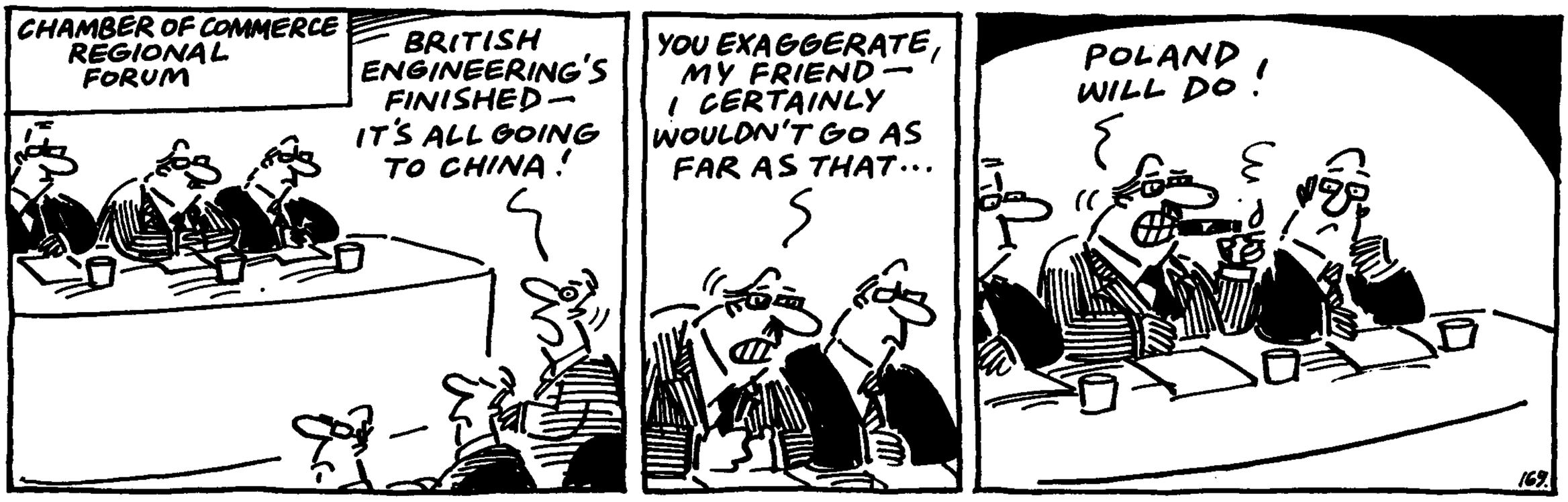
More significantly, the absurd delay in bringing the charges could itself present an obstacle to any trial. The concept of justice delayed being justice denied is now enshrined in the human rights legislation. That could open up the possibility of an abuse application on the basis that no fair trial is possible because of the four-year delay. That could raise the prospect of the case being thrown out because of the DTI's familiar tardiness.

The only plus factor from the delay is that it could be hard to argue that a trial should not happen because of all the prejudicial publicity surrounding the Slickers and ex-*Mirror* editor Piers Morgan. It was all such a long time ago that nobody can be expected to remember what it was all about. Maybe that was the DTI's cunning plan all along!

CLEARLY Fred Clough was in the running to score one of the longest ever British sentences for fraud had he not pleaded guilty and testified for the prosecution in the Versailles case

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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BRITISH ENGINEERING'S FINISHED— IT'S ALL GOING TO CHINA!
YOU EXAGGERATE, MY FRIEND— I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T GO AS FAR AS THAT…
POLAND WILL DO!
169.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

My Big Fat Greek Profit

Easyjet shares sold by founder Stelios Haji-Ioannou in the past year

against his former boss and partner, Carl Cushnie.

Clough was jailed for six years – the same as Cushnie, who pleaded not guilty but did not testify and blamed it all on Fred. Given that there are usually big discounts for an early plea and giving evidence, it would seem that Clough was probably on at least 10 years and possibly 12 years for what Mr Justice Jackson called "a grand and evil scheme". Only Abbas Gokal of BCCI fame has been jailed for more than 10 years – he received a 14-year sentence.

Cushnie's lawyers, somewhat absurdly, want to see him do no jail time but only community service on the basis that he was acquitted of the main £170m Versailles trading finance fraud and convicted only of defrauding investors of £23m put into an associated trade finance venture whose money helped to prop up the one-time stock market high flyer. Cushnie may have a chance of at least getting a lesser sentence on appeal given the six years for mastermind Clough who pleaded guilty to both frauds.

Confiscation proceedings are to be taken against both Cushnie, who sold Versailles shares worth more than £25m, and Clough who was said to have made £19m. But given that the most they can serve will be four years and that they will be eligible for parole after three it is hard to imagine exactly how either man, but particularly Clough, can be made to hand over any assets squirreled away offshore.

Meanwhile the Versailles auditors Nunn Hayward who ignored warnings about the fraud continue in business. The fraud consisted largely of Clough and Cushnie cross-firing payments between real and fictional customers so generating phoney sales and profits. The Versailles accounts were largely rubber-stamped by Nunn Hayward and really prepared by an unlicensed book-keeper working for Clough.

Why in the face of the Versailles losses and convictions Nunn Hayward should be considered fit to audit anybody's business is a question only the Institute of Chartered Accountants can answer. The firm has been fined and forced to pay costs totalling £125,000 while the audit partner Thomas Dales has been expelled by the bean counters' watchdog, the Joint Disciplinary Scheme. But how can that be considered adequate given the losses suffered by Versailles shareholders?

THE Versailles "black hole" is exactly why investors look to collect from auditors through civil action. A bill Nunn Hayward may yet face.

Often the auditors are the only deep pockets left to pay. And needless to say the big firms do not like that at all. So in the wake of the scandal it is all the more surprising to hear that trade secretary Patricia Hewitt is minded to give the bean counters a degree of protection from suffering the Enron-prompted meltdown of Arthur Andersen by limiting their liability to negligence actions.

Why the Labour government should be so sympathetic to the bean counters' pleas for protection from the cost of their mistakes is perhaps not so mysterious when it is recalled that Hewitt once worked for none other than the consultancy arm of… Arthur Andersen. And the big accountancy firms are always looking to provide services free or below cost to Labour.

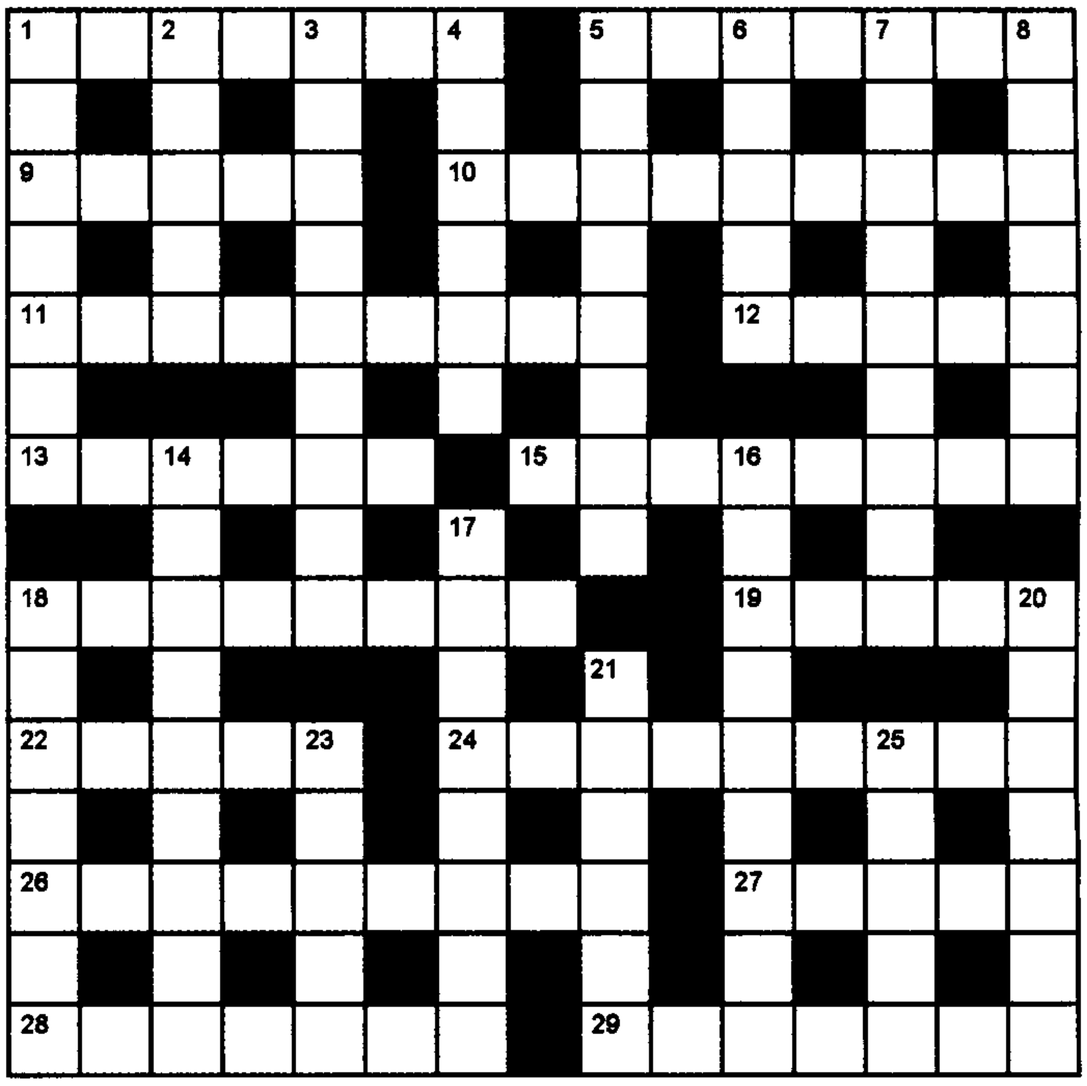
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 264

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 2 July 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/5ac. High-risk sport for those with a pressing need: rough, topless BMX Orienteering? (7,7)
9 Find out soldier's not finished having an erection (3,2)
10 Be inclined to grasp genitalia King put out like a squid (9)
11 Roving hand, one wanting a good greasing? (5,4)
12 Series of steps taken to get Brown to resign (5)
13 Politically correct in passion, so dated jazz lover (6)
15 Still on top, Ursula initially (take good note) gets gobbled (8)
18 Hickey involved with the French, in the dual manner of arses (8)
19 To criticise one Conservative is to cause alarm (5)
22 A calling to account when car given to Tony's no.1 (5)
24 Well done sticky stuff over one when gobbling date (4,2,3)
26 "On reflection, one's PR's awful," Brown's end as one out of political favour (3-6)
27 A rock in the main? Gutless IDS a hindrance! (5)
28/29 Mediocre band of luvvies for which directors don't take full liability? (7,7)

DOWN

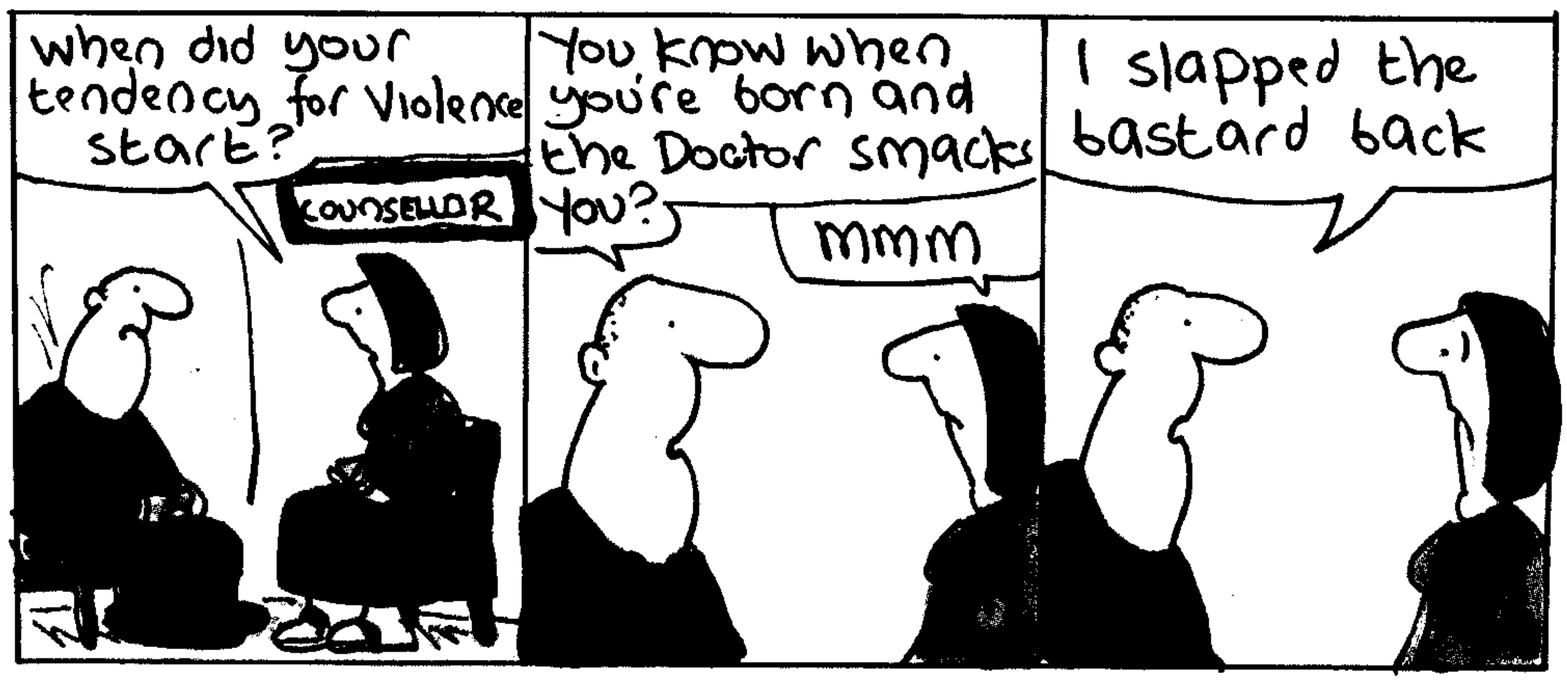
1/18dn. The main reason we won't join Europe on the level? (7,7)
2 One madman turned up: leader of Conservatives, a shirty thing (5)
3 Politician-speak makes you "evacuate gas"? (5,4)
4 Sex is poor without painting up movie people (6)
5 One grand gets no small car to speak of – public disgrace! (8)
6 Love piece, visually stimulating work (2,3)
7 Is Heather putting on weight in a capital place? (9)
8/20 Gory countdown's screwed Bush's vision of USA? (4,3,7)
14 Bogus identity rattled PM Tony used to get time off (9)
16 Terribly unhip, me? Oh, you sound a brassy thing! (9)
17 "Point at which member dies off" was rather poetical (8)
18 See 1 dn.
20 See 8
21 Is able to walk arse over tip after cold drink (6)
23 Murdoch title – highway robbery! (5)
25 One time sexual partner having erection in conference centre (5)

Crossword 263 winner: M. COLDRICK

ACROSS: 1/5 Tabloid press 9 Prost 10 Blasphemy 11 Cockfight 12 Swish 13 Toss-up 14 Conjugal 17 Knackers 19 Abacus 22 Ogres 24 Voice-over 26 Elevenses 27 Tramp 28/29 Dirty weekend.

DOWN: 1 Topic 2 Broncos 3 Out of luck 4 Debugs 5 Plant pot 6 Expos 7 Spewing 8 Eye-holes 13 Takeover 15 Job centre 16 Travesty 18 Airhead 20 Caviare 21 Jigsaw 23 Smear 25 Roped.

HUSBAND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I slapped the bastard back

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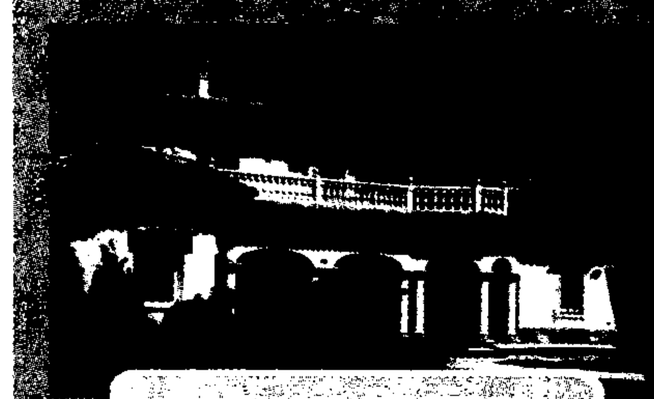

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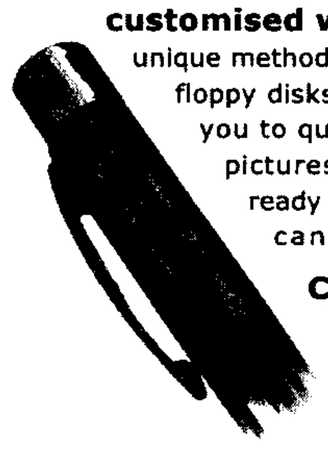

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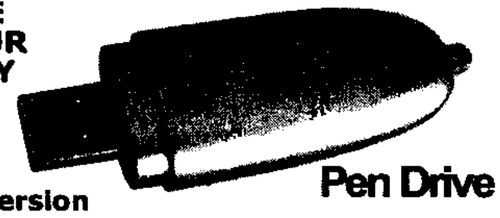

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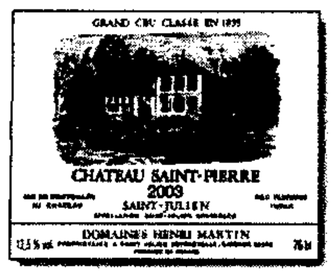

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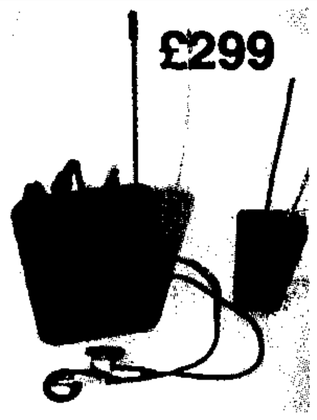

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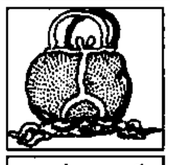

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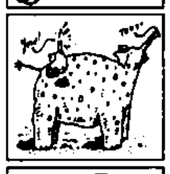

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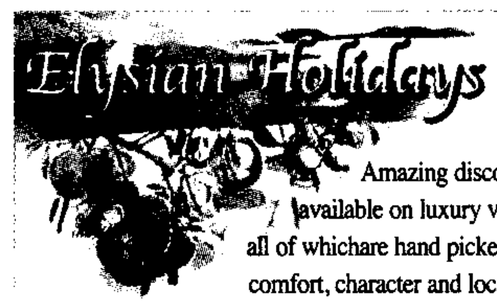

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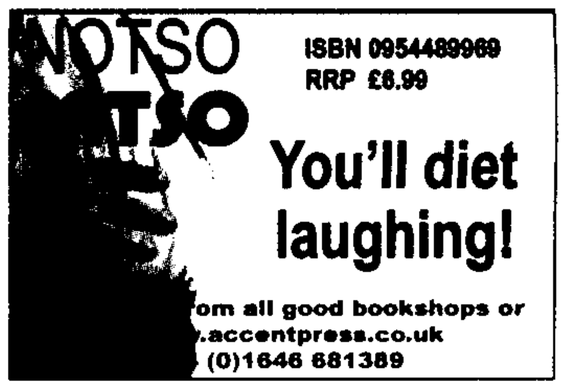

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DROWNING IN DEBT! Need £6K to clear decks and set up own business. Any help appreciated! S/C: 40-45-27. A/C: 71573594.

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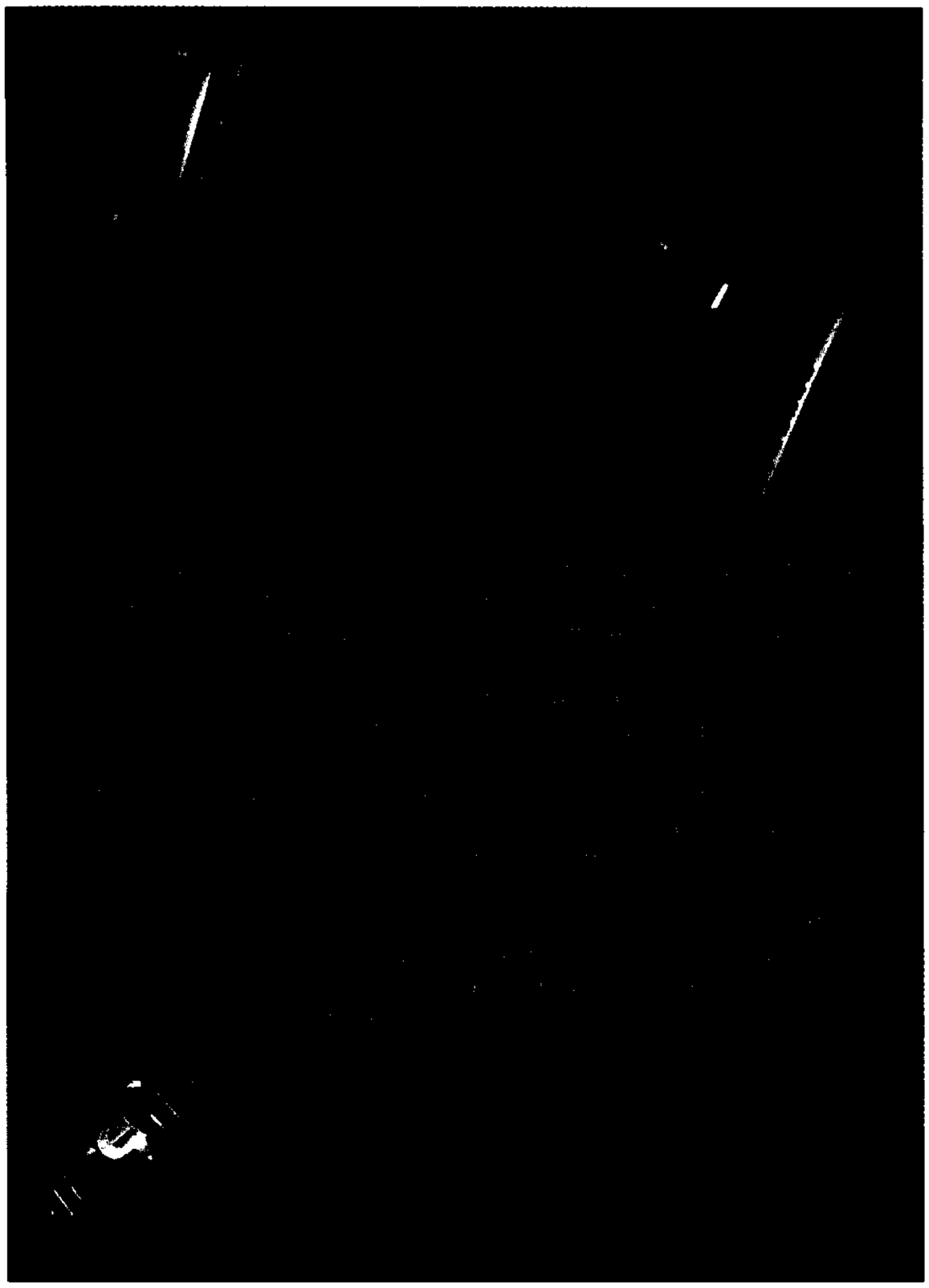

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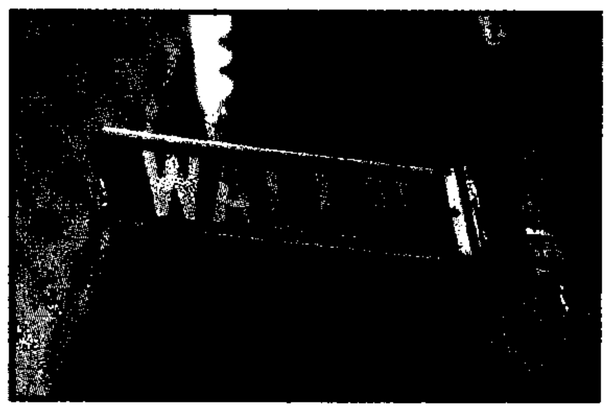

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